DION

THE ROCK 'N' ROLL PHILOSOPHER

Conversations on Life, Recovery, Faith, and Music

DION DiMUCCI
and ADAM JABLIN

With Contributions by
PAUL SIMON, BISHOP ROBERT BARRON, and ERIC CLAPTON

DION

The Rock 'n' Roll Philosopher

Martin & Co
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Conversations on Life, Recovery, Faith, and Music

Dion DiMucci and Adam Jablin

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Table of Contents

Cover

Half Title

Title

Copyright

Table of Contents

Foreword
Preface
Prologue

1. Introduction
2. About Adam Jablin
3. Freedom of Excellence
4. Enchantment
5. Manual to Automatic
6. On the Road
7. Relationships Never End
8. Braggin' Blues
9. My Favorite Rock Writer
10. Runaround Sue

11. Detaching with Love

12. B.E.S.T. (Bless, Edify, Share, Touch)

13. Three Short Stories That Changed My Life

14. Center of My Life

15. Reverse a Decision

16. *Attitude*

17. Dion and Dan Murrow, "The Harlem Crusader"

18. The Four Typical Addictions (Success vs. Fulfillment)

19. My Mentor

20. Life Is About Giving

21. My Brother, Lou Reed

22. Lou Reed's Induction Speech

23. Stevie Van Zandt's Induction Speech

24. The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame

25. Principle Behind Authority and Responsibility

26. Bridges and Walls

27. Love vs. Approval

28. How I Learned

29. My Top Lists

30. Keeping Your Eye on the Ball

31. Blocking the Sunlight of the Spirit

32. The Four Horsemen of Atheism

33. From "The Wanderer" to "The Thunderer"

34. Broad Shoulders

35. Rock 'n' Roll Q&A with Dion

36. Here in America (Song for Sam Cooke)

37. Dr. Dion

38. I Had a Dream

39. 46 Servants

40. An American Idea

41. Forgiveness: The Foundation of All Healing

42. Watching the Wheels Go 'Round

43. Being Diligent

44. How Did This Happen to You?

45. Making Decisions

46. Claude Monet

47. A Divine Exchange

48. The Primary Question

Appendix: Words from Friends:

1. Bob Dylan

2. Bruce Springsteen

3. Peter Townshend

4. Dave Marsh

5. Dick Clark

Acknowledgments

i
ii
iii
iv
v
vi
vii
viii
ix
x
xi

xii
xiii
xiv
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37

78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117

198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211

Guide

Cover
Half Title
Title
Copyright
Table of Contents
Foreword
Preface

Prologue
Start of Content
Appendix: Words from Friends:
Acknowledgments

Foreword

Dion DiMucci and I have been friends for a long time; the reasons are easy to understand. First, there's that accent. His Bronx sonority is a bit different from my Queens pronunciation, but I doubt listeners in Dubuque, Mobile, or Fort Worth could tell us apart. It's New York. Of course, there's our shared musical heritage. Dion is the voice of Bronx soul with a dash of Hank Williams stirred in, and I'm more Cleftones and Everly Brothers, but we both know the same obscure R&B records and can say which B side was better than the hit.

Our friendship grew from more than just New York roots. We've come to know and understand each other, with a respect for the values we share, many of which are spoken of in this book. Dion and I don't see each other very often but we do speak on the phone, and these conversations, which can go on for an hour, usually drift into a discussion of the spiritual. His deep understanding and hard-earned insights come, in part, from his Catholic upbringing and his experience with AA. Neither of those sources of wisdom are in my background, but we often find ourselves in agreement on these matters. Dion has a special kindness and generosity, as well as the plain-spoken common sense that make knowing him a privilege. We've been friends a long time.

—Paul Simon

Preface

Dion DiMucci has one of the most beautiful and distinctive voices in popular music. As Bruce Springsteen himself observes, Dion's vocal style provides a link between the Big Band period and Rock 'n' Roll. Bob Dylan construes him as a "bluesman from another Delta," and Lou Reed considers it a privilege to be able to sing backup for him. Among his many musical friends are Paul Simon, Stevie Van Zandt, Van Morrison, and Pete Townshend. Heck, the Beatles even put him on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper*. He has produced memorable and groundbreaking music for the past sixty years.

But how many people realize that Dion is also a man of enormous spiritual depth and insight? How many know that he fought his way through a debilitating addiction and experienced the breakthrough of divine grace? How many understand that, even for many of his musical peers, he is a source of wisdom? The book you are about to read—Dion, the Rock 'n' Roll Philosopher—amply explores both the music and the mysticism, both sides of this extraordinary man.

I want to share just a few of the spiritual gems that I discovered scattered throughout these conversations with Dion. A first one, delivered with the poetic understatement typical of his songwriting: "Humility is the healer of pain." When we see, he explains, that we are punished, not so much for our sins as by our sins, we are already on the road to redemption. He writes, "God loves us unconditionally; he doesn't punish us! He loves us. We are punished by the act, not for it." I don't think St. John of the Cross could have said it better. Another is his brilliant connection between John Lennon's "Help" and his later composition "Watching the Wheels." In that first song, we hear the almost desperate cry of a man who

was at the height of his fame, power, and wealth: Help! I need somebody. Help! Not just anybody. Help! And in the second song, written just before Lennon's tragic death, we hear someone who has found the center, no longer riding on the merry go round. Dion places great stress upon the four principal temptations that the spiritual masters have identified as substitutes for God: wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. And he teaches us detachment from them so that we might attach ourselves to God alone.

—Bishop Robert Barron

Anyone interested in music and pop culture will find lots to

enjoy in this book. The narratives, the conversations, the pictures of Dion with practically every major figure in rock music—all of it is delightful. But anyone looking for meaning, anyone hungry and thirsty for God, anyone who wants peace of soul, will also find a great deal to savor in these pages. I for one am very glad that the Wanderer—"with his two fists of iron and going nowhere"—finally found what he was looking for and that he has shared his spiritual joy with the rest of us.

Prologue

I began listening to music, and through music, when I was very small, listening to everything I could, but always sifting through, unconsciously searching—yearning I suppose—but for what I did not know.

I think I do now.

There was so much music on the radio in the early fifties: jazz, bebop, dance band, and classical music. Popular music was what we listened to mostly as a family, a lot of it spilling over from the war.

Then, in the middle of it all, I heard "That'll Be the Day" by Buddy Holly and the Crickets,

Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, then Big Bill Broonzy, then Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, then Howling Wolf! They all shone through, in a very deep way, and I was spellbound.

Then came Freddy King, and for me the die was cast.

This is what I had been looking for all the time, something that actually came out of the music, all the way out of the speakers, and put its arms around me.

And from that revelation and the absorption of all the other stuff I was discovering, I began to fantasize. I had a dream—not a night-time dream, but a walking, wide-awake dream.

I was going to be one of these guys, or a little bit of all of them.

Then Robert Johnson stopped me in my tracks, and I realized that music was not a fantasy. It was real, and sometimes it was born out of great pain, definitely not about popularity. It was a deadly serious affair.

I've been around a long time now, but I still "listen through" for that elusive ingredient . . .

Soul is what it is, heart and soul, and I still hear it from time to

time, but it's up to me to be able to hear it. I have to keep my mind open. For me, when I reflect, the music of the fifties and early sixties contained that ingredient in a magnificent quantity. It was everywhere.

Most of the music I was listening to and discovering back then was made by Black guys, but there was also a large squad of young white men, who were holding their own—Eddie Cochran, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, the Everlys—a lot of them coming from country music, but some were from the urban districts too, and they were clearly listening to the Black guys as well.

So that's where we're going now, back to the fifties, and the Bronx. Not many people grew out of that era and survived. There were many, many casualties, alongside others who had found their ground, and happily retired.

And there are a few that shone bright then, made it to the top, and shine on still. This man I'm talking about is one of those, one of a kind, unparalleled in his achievement and stature. He is a genius singer, writer, musician, and healer. He is also awake and full-grown into himself. He is the perfect example of how you can do what you love to do and still be available to the lives of others.

—Eric Clapton

I've been listening to him all my life. He is a friend and a colleague of all the musicians I looked up to, and followed. He also has that essential ingredient: Soul. Buckets of it. And that sense of Soul is what this book is all about.

I heard it in him then, and I hear it in him still.

Dion DiMucci.

Dion at the Texas Fairgrounds, 1996.

1.

Introduction

A Journey into the Life of the Mind

It was a beautiful day in Boca Raton, Florida. The temperature was hovering in the low seventies, with surprisingly low humidity, and not a cloud in the sky. Dion and I strolled into the Grand Lux Café in Town Center Mall for lunch and to discuss this book you're reading right now. They seated us, and we looked over the menu.

"Yo, what looks good?" Dion asked. We both scanned the specials.

Our waiter came over with two waters and told us, "The Avocado-Chipotle Cheeseburger is my personal favorite." I looked at Dion, nodded, and winked. He ordered for us.

"Yeah, two of those, please—medium. Hold the buns, and we'd like grilled vegetables instead of French fries, please."

I smiled.

"Yes, sir. And, *Go Yankees!*" the waiter said.

Dion was wearing his black-on-black New York Yankees baseball cap, a black cotton T-shirt under a black jacket, with black jeans. He had a razor-sharp, salt-and-pepper goatee, and cool rock 'n' roll glasses.

"Adam, I want to bring people into our reality. *A Higher Reality*. How God directs all our thoughts and all our decisions."

I nodded.

"That's why I'm not squeamish. If you were to unzip my mind and look inside, you'd see it's very organized. My thoughts are not scattered. My mind is sound. I have the fullness of my faith. I live

by spiritual principles, and I have great peace. I feel we are living the privileged way of life."

I nodded my head in agreement and rubbed my chin.

"D, my mission statement as a man and as a life coach is simple: I want to bring people into our conversations. I want us to produce a book that shows how we talk and how you taught me to live my life."

"Produce?" Dion said, shaking his head. "No—I'm an artist, an expressionist. That's what I do with my voice."

Ahhh, the voice. *The voice!* The voice that Lou Reed said ". . . was unlike any other I'd heard before. Dion could do all the turns, stretch those syllables so effortlessly, soar so high; he could reach the sky and dance there among the stars forever."

The voice. The voice that made Bruce Springsteen say, "Since I heard 'Teenager in Love' on my mom's radio as a small boy, he inspired an artistic curiosity within me. I love Dion!"

That voice.

"Adam, allow me to give you an example . . . Salvador Dali was a draftsman, and van Gogh was an expressionist. Two amazing artists. My dear friends Frankie Valli and Barry Gibb are *produced*. Each song—you know what you're gonna get. It's perfect." Dion shook his head. "That's not me. I'm not produced. I'm not looking for perfection; I'm free, like van Gogh—an expressionist! Not that one is better than the other—just different."

And that's how this book will read—like a good album. We will hit all the objectives, but our criteria will be different. Instead of musicianship, songwriting, and presentation, we will focus on spirituality, truth, and wisdom. But my conversations with Dion are *not* just a good album. They're a masterpiece, like my mentor himself.

You're about to go on a wonderful journey—a journey into the life of the mind. Dion's teachings to me. Our conversations. Buckle up—it's a hell of a ride.

Dion—Staten Island, St. George Theatre, July 2022.

Home studio, 2020.

Dion and Adam. Center Stage, 2021.

2.

About Adam Jablin

BY DION DIMUCCI

I first met Adam Jablin when I visited his elementary school in 1986, to give a motivational talk and sing some songs. He made an impression on me, because he was that kind of kid. He's still that way today. He walks into the room, and the room is better off for his presence. He lights the place up with his enthusiasm.

He came by his gifts honestly. His grandfather and his great-grandfather were pious and generous men who tried to change their corner of the world through prayer and personal influence. His father is an entrepreneurial genius who built a manufacturing powerhouse from the ground up.

Adam has taken all these gifts into another generation and up to a higher level. He's found a way to succeed in life—not only in business, but also in the areas that matter more: family, social action, spirituality, and the life of the mind. Now he spends his life teaching others how to succeed in all the same ways.

He's not making this stuff up. In fact, Adam Jablin is traveling on an ancient path of wisdom—the same one traveled by the Founding Fathers of America and by many other sages, saints, and historical game-changers. What Adam does, though, is to share that ancient wisdom in simple, practical ways. He's always substantial, yet he's always entertaining.

One of those long-ago sages once said that the glory of God is *a man fully alive*. I believe that's what Adam is. And that's the kind of life he's sharing with us in this book. It's a life rich in beauty, meaning, and purpose.

So much of it depends on our relationships. Our lives are constantly caught up in other lives: family members, friends, next-door neighbors, employers, employees, customers, clients, suppliers, contractors, competitors, and rivals. We fail in life when we fail in these relationships—when we treat these people like something other than human beings, when we treat people like things.

Adam knows that relationships aren't easy, but he's managed to make them simpler for us. He teaches us never to lose sight of others, and never to forget what and who they are.

Again, this isn't easy, but it can be simple. And it can be done. I know because I've been watching Adam Jablin live this way for a long time. I've known him now for thirty years.

The proof of the principles can be seen in his life. I've seen it, and I'm here to testify. You're going to love this book, and it's going to change your life for the better.

Rock on!

Dion and Adam—Adam's first year in recovery. 2006.

3.

Freedom of Excellence

"I'M THE TYPE OF GUY THAT

LIKES TO ROAM AROUND..."

Dion and I were at the southern tip of Manhattan on the Hudson River in New York City's Battery Park. We looked out at the awesome view of the Statue of Liberty. Our Lady Liberty represents freedom, democracy, hope, and opportunity.

"Adam, when I was kid, my grandfather took me right here. He pointed out and said, 'That's the Statue of Liberty. They erected her here on the East Coast. On the West Coast, they should erect the Statue of Responsibility—because with great liberty comes great responsibility."

"D, I don't care what the news says—I still believe this is the greatest country in the world."

D nodded and said, "Adam, I don't live by focus groups, public opinion, award shows, famous people's influence, horoscopes, Fox News, or CNN. I live by God's rules, not man's . . . and I have found a true *freedom of excellence*. I'm independent—I'm a free agent."

That freedom was what I was always searching for in a drink, drug, money, or power.

Dion asked, "Answer this question. When is a train most free—on or off the tracks?" "Off?" I guessed.

Dion shook his head, “No. If a train is off the track, it won’t go anywhere. It’s stuck in the rubble, concrete, and muck! The train needs the tracks to run on. As you know, a train can go pretty fast. Well, we need God’s laws. They are our tracks. So, we are most free when doing God’s will.”

That made a lot of sense.

We stared out at Liberty Island. Inscribed on the statue—“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

These words, penned by Emma Lazarus in 1883, stood for emancipation and truth.

“And be careful of relativism.”

I scratched my head and squinted my eyes.

Dion with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, hanging out in Rome after Mass in 2000—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger later would become Pope Benedict XVI.

“D, what’s ‘relativism’?”

“A simple definition would be, *people making up their own truths*. Dr. Jordan Peterson said that just because there are a large number of ways to interpret reality, that doesn’t mean they’re all equally viable. And the Pope once said that relativism is what’s wrong in the world—everyone having their own truth.”

We started to stroll through Battery Park, past monuments honoring soldiers, explorers, and immigrants. I thought about that for a second. *My own truth*. Does that mean that fifteen years ago, at my intervention, when my family was explaining my alcoholic and destructive behavior while trying to save my life, I could have just said, "Well, that's not *my* truth"?

"D, if I had my own truth, I'd be a jerk."

Dion nodded his head and said, "Yeah. You know, most people think my song 'The Wanderer' is about a cool guy . . . but basically, it's about a jerk. The bridge of the song gives it away when he tells on himself. He has a moment where he sees himself accurately:

> *I roam from town to town*
> *I go through life without a care*
> *I'm as happy as a clown*
> *I with my two fists of iron but I'm going nowhere*

"Usually, a clown isn't happy. He's a thin veneer of a man. He knows he has to do some deep introspection and change, but he just keeps running. Some guys grow old, but they never grow up. Not us. We are *men fully alive*. We are *men on track*."

Dion home in the Bronx, 1961.

Dion shooting the video for "Blues Coming On" for his #1 blues album for ALL of 2020, *Blues with Friends*.

QUICK HISTORY LESSON FROM *THE WANDERER*

Did you know that "The Wanderer" is one of the songs I didn't get credit for writing? Unbelievable! I was young and stupid. It was based on a Bronx neighborhood guy named Jackie Burns. Jackie was in the navy. On leave, he'd come walking down the main street in the Belmont section of the Bronx, like Conor McGregor, the UFC Mixed Martial Arts champion—that swagger. His hair was slicked back with petroleum jelly, and he would be wearing a white tank top, sporting his tattoos. Hey, the guy was ahead of his time.

You couldn't help but notice him. At one point, he dated this girl named Flo and got her name tattooed on his left arm. Then, when he broke up with Flo, he covered her name up with a black panther and started dating Mary, whose name he got tattooed on his right bicep. When he started dating this girl Janie, he got the "Mary" covered up with a cool-looking dagger. Then, somewhere along the line, he got "Rosie" tattooed on his chest, with a big red rose.

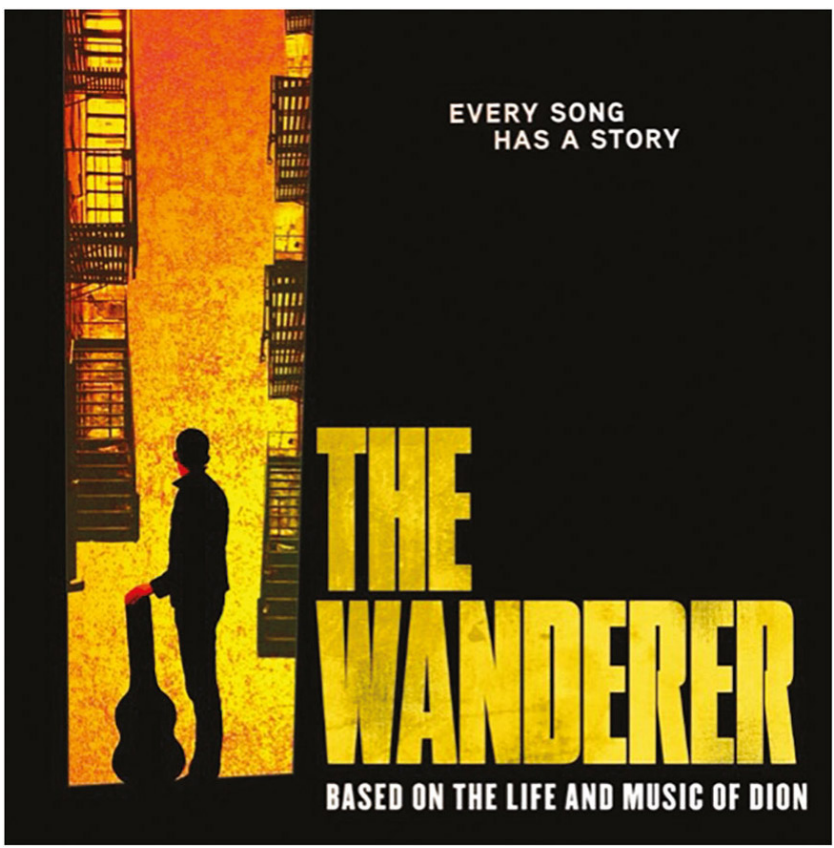
"The Wanderer" is loosely based on Jackie and is about a guy who is not a grown-up. It's truly a darker song than you hear. The arrangement on the hit record I put together back in 1961 is upbeat and in a major key. If I was recording it today, it would probably be in a minor-chord setting. The majority of songs were in a major key back then, so it was a happy feel.

I recorded the song one day at Bell Sound Studios, at 8th Avenue and 46th Street, with a bunch of musicians from the Apollo Theater band. Panama Francis was on drums. He played a reverse shuffle. Sticks Evans also on percussion. Tito Wilshire, piano. Big Buddy Lucas on horn (he played that iconic sax solo). Milt Tilton on bass. And I had the Dell Satins—five guys I found singing on a street corner in Manhattan up on 92nd St. I gave them big-band horn parts to sing that I heard at the Apollo Theater. That's what you're hearing.

I thought it would be a good idea to sing on the downbeat of every measure instead of the usual swing, offbeat style that the early blues guys would naturally capture with that approach. I sang "Ruby Baby," my hit record, on the offbeat.

"The Wanderer" is a real white Rock 'n' Roll approach to the

blues. The guy in "The Wanderer" is the poster boy for making up his own rules and thinking that pleasure and self-seeking, and doing anything you want—especially if you don't get caught—is freedom. So, you have a lot of men today who are very noncommittal, and they think they're free, but they have no purpose, they have no roots—they're empty. I would say that, if you're looking for purpose and direction, take responsibility; if you're still lost, take more responsibility. You need to find the center and see yourself accurately—life isn't about you. Somewhere along the line, you'll find out that you have really no control over many things and that life is about giving. And this God-given scriptural direction is a path to freedom; it's the very thing that makes freedom possible.



Poster for the play *The Wanderer*. Written by Charles Messina, produced by Jill Menza, directed by Kenneth Ferrone.

WSM
Honky Tonk Blues
My bucket's got a hole in it
Baby, we're really in love
Honky Tonk Blues
I'll never get out of this world alive
HANK WILLIAMS
M-G-M
EXTENDED PLAY 45 r.p.m. RECORD

4.

Enchantment

"WHEN SHE KISSED ME, I WAS BORN, AND SHE SAID GOOD-BYE AND I KNEW RIGHT AWAY I WAS BORN TO CRY NOW I'M HAPPY, AND THE JOKE'S ON HER 'CAUSE I FOUND THAT PLACE FOR LOVERS WHO WANDER."

At the age of ten, I heard "Honky-Tonk Blues" by Hank Williams. I was totally enthralled. Then I heard "Cold, Cold Heart," and I still can remember that defining moment. It transported me outside myself. That's what *ecstasy* means—"standing outside yourself." A place of delight and pleasure. I was so struck with this experience, I started learning every Hank Williams song I could get on record. In fact, I learned more than forty songs.

Then, hearing Jimmy Reed sing "Baby, What You Want Me to Do?" only deepened and widened that feeling of enchantment. Then along came Little Richard, Big Joe Williams, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry. So, when I got a little older and I started learning some chords on the guitar, and then singing and writing my own songs, I could take myself there. To this special place that I was feeling. Soon after, I was trying to import or transmit this *enchantment* to others. That's why I always say I love to take people on a trip.

My experience with Hank Williams, I believe, informed my approach to songwriting and wanting to transfer this to others, so

that they could feel what I was feeling.

A singer-songwriter understands the power of song—both real and symbolically—its physical and emotional connection to the listener. A Rock 'n' Roll song has a magical effect on listeners—it awakens the forces of their imagination. It's like a dream and reality blending. When I lay down a great rhythm track, it tends to bypass the critical-thinking part of the mind. The hypnotic feel helps to get you in the song more fully—hopefully, lifting the listener to a higher reality, one of peace, beauty, wisdom, and truth. The experience won't touch the analytical mind. My songs, hopefully, in some small way, awaken, amplify, and kick open the sense of being alive. Songs make you feel fully alive, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. My focus, my intent, is to bring my listener into a place of pleasure and a place of enchantment.

The great rock song has the rhythm, the groove, the sounds of the words, the melody. It has the power to enrapture. A great song has the power to enchant.

Keith Green's song "Until Your Love Broke Through" opened my mind, heart, and soul, like an ax cracking open a dam that kept me from this higher reality. It broke through my habits, my prejudices, my resistance to religion and transcendence. For me, that could never happen with mere words. On my own, I am too analytical, objective, and critical—therefore, grounded in my prejudices and ignorance, cut off from a higher reality of enchantment.

Enchantment comes from Latin and French words that mean "song." Songs transport you outside yourself.

Here, I'm singing Hank Williams' "Cold, Cold Heart" to Tony Bennet, who covered the song in 1952. I was way better!

Here I am at PS32 auditorium playing for Parents Night, 1952.

5.

Manual to Automatic

"IT'S NOT WHAT'S IN YOUR POCKET, SON, BUT WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART THAT MAKES US ONE. THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE."

The Grille on Congress—one of our favorite meeting places. It's been a welcome-to-the-neighborhood Boca Raton hangout since 1999. It specializes in button-down American classic cuisine. Rich textures and high ceilings provide a comfortable atmosphere for enjoying fresh food and good conversation. My career had started to take off. *The Hero Project*—my life coaching, my mission, my calling—was getting attention in the media, and I received many invitations to speak on alcoholism, addiction, unhealthy dependencies, and the hero's journey out of that hell. Backdrop—I had anxiety about an appearance I'd just finished for Fox Business News with Kennedy (Lisa Kennedy Montgomery) ,anchor of *Fox Business News*. I felt I didn't perform my best, and I had to share with my mentor.

"Adam, when I'm in a song, I know exactly who I am. I'm not thinking. I am lying back in the gift that God has given me with great trust and enjoyment." Dion was wearing a black kangol cap, a black cotton T-shirt, and black jeans. Dion stands out with his unique Bronx coolness, and—as Bob Dylan said in his book, *The*

Philosophy of Modern Song—"is an elder legend, a bluesman from another delta. He looked like he just came from a concert."

"But it's not going onstage and making it happen. It's actually quite the opposite. It's resting in God's hands and allowing it to happen. Tell me what happened to you. Why do you feel this way?"

I told D about some of the things that were going on in my family, with my kids, my business, and how I'd been feeling spread pretty thin lately, I felt it affected my presentation.

"I couldn't shut my head up. It was like a broken record playing that just wouldn't stop. My mouth was saying all the right things to the cameras, and, all the while, my head was thinking about my relationships."

"Ahhhh, Adam, where you truly see recovery is in *relationships*. We see our recovery played out in our relationships. You need to concentrate on your recovery, and everything else will take care of itself."

Dion could tell I was still in my head over my performance on television.

"Yo, Adam—nobody's perfect. But, when I'm not in the right place . . . if my relationship is off with you, or her, and that guy, I can't perform on my game. But, when I'm right with God, everybody gets the benefits of it. When I'm right with Him, my wife gets the benefits, my daughters get the benefits, my fans and my music get the benefits. Being right with Him, I got the power. So, it's not who I am—it's *whose* I am. It's the difference between being on automatic and being on manual!"

That blew my mind. "D, say that again."

Dion laughed. "It's the difference between being on automatic or manual. When I'm right with God, I'm on automatic. My concentration is razor sharp, but it happens automatically. Being onstage is a celebration and doesn't drain my energy. My road manager, Art McLaughlin, for years would always ask me after the show, 'How was it out there?' I would say I was relaxed . . . I really enjoyed myself and enjoyed the audience. When I was on automatic, I had a blast! I could do the entire show again.

"So, the performance is not getting *better*, Adam, it's getting *closer*. Closer to Him. Closer to the One. Being under the spout where the glory comes out, trusting the One who gave me the gift in the first place and being right in the middle of it and being grateful for the opportunity to share it with people. Saint Augustine

said that, when you're singing, it's like praying twice." Dion slapped the table. "Automatic!

"Adam, in every field of endeavor, you learn your craft, you practice it, you study it, you research it, you uncover the nuances. If you're a golfer, you study the masters—their swings. You study film footage. You study the perfect setup, precisely the right way to keep your hips, your shoulders, your eyes, and focus. You don't just walk up to a golf ball and swing away."

Dion shook his head left to right.

"No . . . but, once you put all that hard work in—all that time learning, mimicking, practicing, and observing—then, you trust your hand–eye coordination. It's a routine." Dion snapped his fingers. "Automatic!"

I nodded, starting to get it, downloading my mentor's wisdom.

"Same with Michael Jordan. First, he studied Dr. J and Elgin Baylor. Jordan was famous for how hard he practiced. The dribble, the outside shot, the famous fadeaway, the mid-range, the post-up game, the foul shot, passing, and defense. Eric Clapton studied B. B. King, the harmonics, the rhythm, the scales, the approach, the touch, the films, the blues records, the solos, the turnarounds, and so on. I studied Hank Williams, the Hillbilly Shakespeare. I studied Jimmy Reed, the way he grooved. I wanted to communicate like Hank Williams and groove like Jimmy Reed. I studied Robert Johnson—his intention, his lyrics, his guitar playing, and the approach. But once I did all my research and practice, I let it all go and trusted my gift. I allow it to come from a very deep place inside me to express the heart and soul of everything I've digested. Automatic!

"Look at you, Adam—you've spent twenty-three years making lace. You ran the biggest lace company on the face of the planet, with more than one hundred employees. You learned how to inspire and have your employees trust you. Also look at your sixteen years in recovery. Studying the twelve-step, spiritual way of life, reading theology books, and being open to direction. Being mentored and asking deep questions on relationships, friendships, marriage, and raising children. The countless hours you put into revising the lies that were solidly planted in your belief system, revising old theories that didn't work. So now, when someone asks for help, you can trust your intuition, because it draws on all that data—automatically!"

I smiled. Dion made me feel like a proud man.
Lesson learned.

Dion and Adam at The Grille on Congress. Conversations, 2022 (Eating, as always).

C.F.Martin & Co.

6.

On the Road

"OH, WELL, I'M THE TYPE OF GUY WHO WILL NEVER SETTLE DOWN WHERE PRETTY GIRLS ARE, WELL, YOU KNOW THAT I'M AROUND I KISS 'EM AND I LOVE 'EM 'CAUSE TO ME THEY'RE ALL THE SAME I HUG 'EM AND I SQUEEZE 'EM—THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW MY NAME THEY CALL ME THE WANDERER, YEAH, THE WANDERER I ROAM AROUND, AROUND, AROUND."

The Beat Generation of the 1950s was a literary movement that was ahead of its time. Led by William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac—they were the hippies before there were any. They experimented with psychedelic drugs, sexual liberation, and spiritual quests, pushing boundaries in society. Adam, I wasn't conscious of it, but looking back, "The Wanderer" (released in 1961) was inspired by the philosophy of the Beat Generation. The word *beatnik* entered the national vocabulary, and these authors began to influence not only mainstream literature but also fashion. The Beatles took their name from the movement. The Beatniks were true renegades. Bohemians. Rebels. Wanderers.

I'll never forget exploring Greenwich Village with Buddy Holly—listening to poetry, the blues, and Jazz . . . wandering through the neighborhood bars and coffee shops. We wore dark colors, straight-

leg cigarette pants, and turtleneck sweaters. I was evolving as a man and an artist. But I was still the Bronx, the streets, my gang—the Fordham Baldies. Now, looking back at these pictures, I see the beginning of my series of rebirths that Bob Dylan described so beautifully in his book *The Philosophy of Modern Song:*

> Dion DiMucci evolved throughout his career, changing outwardly but maintaining recognizable characteristics across every iteration. Not reincarnation in the strictest sense but an amazing series of re-births, taking him from the earnest Teenager in Love to a swaggering Wanderer, a soul-searching friend of Abraham, Martin, and John to a hard-edged leather-clad king of the urban jungle who was a template for the fellow Italo-rocker Bruce Springsteen. Most recently, he has realized one of his early dreams and become some kind of elder legend, a bluesman from another Delta.

Dylan was the fulfillment of what the BeatGeneration was striving for. He carried the best of their spirit forward. It started with *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* . . . the exuberance, the spontaneity, the direct experience, the spirituality, his biblical imagination. He abstracted a truth and poetically infused it into song.

When there's an enormous distance between what someone is doing in a particular field and what *anybody* else is doing, I call that 'genius'. When it comes to songwriting, Bob Dylan is that genius. If he were any further ahead of the pack, he wouldn't be on Earth.

I'm so grateful to Bob. You know, he wrote the liner notes to my number-one album *Dion—Blues With Friends*. But he did so much more for music and our country.

I was a loyal member of the Fordham Baldies, but my dreams were happening far away with the Village Poets and Chuck Berry's guitar playing.

7.

Relationships Never End

"SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER."

—PSALM 23

"Adam, did I ever tell you about my three trips to Rome with Susan?"

I shook my head.

"Well, the first time I went, I was a young man with hit records. I saw through the eyes of an artist." Dion began laughing, reminiscing. "I wore a beret, sunglasses, a silk scarf, with a cigarette hanging out of my mouth and a glass of wine in my hand. We drove around on a moped. I showed off and glorified all the famous artists for Susan. *Babe, this is Michelangelo's stirring statue of Moses that lies within the Basilica of San Pietro in Chains. Yo, Sue—this is Raphael's sixteenth-century fresco of Cupid*. We scootered our way down to the Vatican, and I bragged about what I knew from books. I was a young Italian artist, like Leonardo da Vinci, and that's exactly how I saw Rome—on the surface. I thought it was the artists that made Rome significant. I was identifying with the accolades, the admiration."

I nodded, understanding. “D, I get it.”

“Now, the second time we went to Rome, I was clean and sober for a few years. This time, I saw the beauty of Rome and the artwork from an entirely different point of view. I remember telling Susan, ‘These guys knew they had a gift from God here.’ I felt the city of Rome was all about these artists glorifying God. What a beautiful thing to glorify God with—the gifts He’s given us. The greatest life is the one in pursuit of wisdom, cultivating the life of the mind. And I still feel this is true, but that perspective didn’t go quite all the way. It didn’t show me the whole picture.

“The third time going to the Eternal City of Rome was after my spiritual awakening—after the jog when I encountered God. This time, when Susan and I went to the San Pietro in Vincoli—the Basilica of Saint Peter in Chains—it was with my good friend, Father Joe Linck. I’d brought a list of ten people I wanted to say special prayers for. I remember it like it was yesterday. The place was packed. We saw the statue of Moses, but I waited to see the chains that Saint Peter was bound by when they led him away to be crucified in Rome. They were kept in a reliquary under the main altar. I remember seeing the impressive, illuminated chains of St. Peter and taking my list out and kneeling. I started to pray. That’s when I heard what I can only call *a voice*. A loud whisper in my ear said, *Pray for your father*. I looked around, and nobody was there. Adam, I didn’t expect it. I didn’t want it. I didn’t ask for it. Really . . . my father and I had had our differences. And there was a distance in our relationship. My dad had great qualities. I loved him. But he wasn’t on the list. And yet the voice was too real. I started crying and said a prayer for my dad.”

Just listening, I was shaken up. “D, what happened next?”

“I came out from the altar, and the place was empty! I walked outside and saw Father Joe leaning against one of the pillars on the porch of this beautiful church. I wiped away my tears and told him the story. He said, ‘You know, Dion, relationships never end.’ Grace is always being offered, but it’s frequently refused. Your father wasn’t open to the grace of God while he was here, but he may be closer to the beatific vision now of God’s perfection, and he may be more open to God’s grace and his own growth.”

Dion adjusted his black Kangol and shifted in his seat. “He changed my mind altogether. When my father and I see each other again in Heaven, it won’t be like it was when we last saw each

other on Earth. He's growing in the likeness of God. In the meantime, I'm growing, trying to stay open to the grace of God—and, although I fall short, our relationship will have moved forward."

I giggled. "Yeah, me too." I thought of my grandmother, Gaga, who passed away just before I got sober . . . *Relationships never end.*

"This third trip I knew it wasn't the art, the artists, the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Colosseum, or the ancient ruins that made Rome important . . . It was because Peter and Paul died for their faith. It's because the very ground in Rome is soaked in their blood. Our relationships with Peter and Paul and Moses and Michelangelo—all these relationships are real and never end.

"Our loved ones, the saints, the sages, the apostles, the Founding Fathers—they live on with us, in a higher reality. My dearest friends Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and The Big Bopper have lived on with me, even after that fatal plane crash on February 3, 1959. People tried to call it 'The Day the Music Died.' But, Adam, I say the music lives. Those relationships never end."

I tried to process what I was hearing. It was so powerful. So potent.

"So my three trips to Rome taught me that life is truly about giving, and the glory of God is *man fully alive*."

My father and mother on the Atlantic City Boardwalk in the 1940s.

My father Pat working on his dancing-girl marionette, 1955.

The February 2, 1959, poster for the show at the Surf Ballroom on The Winter Dance Party Tour that took the lives of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and The Big Bopper.

8.

Braggin' Blues

"He always had the name that said it all . . . DION."
—Bruce Springsteen

"I didn't need no bodyguard, I just ruled from my backyard . . . livin' fast, livin' hard, King of the New York streets . . . People come from miles around, to see my royal tenement crown, always up, never down, King of the New York streets."

If you get satire, you get me.
Satire: (noun) The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices. Including my own.

I would say most fans and people who listen to any artist's music feel like they're always writing autobiographical songs. They think they're always singing about themselves. They're not—they're more or less actors singing a song about a character.

People will really get me when they understand that my characters are satire. Like, "The Wanderer" is way over the top. *I'm the type of guy that likes to roam around/I'm never in one place—I roam from town to town / and when I find myself falling for some girl / I hop right into that car of mine / and I drive around the world. I'm the Wanderer, the Wanderer, I roam around.*

Every time I write an album, there's one theme that always

emerges. This *braggin' blues* deal. Now, this goes back to the Bronx, where I lived. Right up the corner was George's Bar and Grill, right across from the historic Tally's Billiards Room, where all the gangsters hung around. I would see them all the time with the tan suits, black shirts, and the gold chains—the boys. So, in my music, this theme will arise—"The Wanderer," "King of the New York Streets," "I Got the Cure," "Gangster of Love," "Baby, Don't You Want a Man Like Me?"

In the blues tradition, we call it "braggin' rights." Muddy Waters would sing "I'm a Man." *"All you pretty women / stand in line / I can make love to you, baby / In an hour's time."* It's way over the top, but it's the most fun song to sing! Yo, I just recorded one with Rory Block called "Don't You Want a Man Like Me?" That one theme always makes its way into my consciousness every time I'm making an album . . . it just doesn't let me go. But it's satire!

Listen . . . Lou Reed came into the studio and sang on "King of the New York Streets." He said to me, "Dion, you have to move on from 'The Wanderer.' " And I said, "Lou—it's satire!!! I love it."

"King of the New York Streets"—*People call me the scandalizer / the world was my appetizer / I turn gangs into fertilizer / King of the New York streets / Local bullies—I deflated backstreet jive that I translated / Top ten girls were all I dated / King of the New York streets . . ."*

"Gangster of Love"—*Baby let's take a ride/hop into my Caddy / I got an offer you can't refuse / I'm gonna be your gangster daddy / Don't call the FBI / Don't call the undercover / Baby, give me a try / I'm gonna be your gangster lover . . . / I'm the gangster of love / What-a you think of that? / I put away all my rivals with a Rat-a-Tat-Tat-Tat*.

"I Got the Cure"—*I got no needles, I got no junk / I'm the drug you need, babe / You don't need that punk / Don't need no smack, no crack cocaine / I got the thing, baby, to take away your pain / One thing's for certain, one thing for sure / No doubt about it—I got the cure*.

Another braggin' blues. . . .

"Don't You Want a Man Like Me?"—*Right on the dot, you show up now / You hit the spot and, baby, I'll tell you how / Let's tie the knot—let's tie it tight / I got the love to last us every night / Baby don't you wanna man like me? / Honey, there ain't nobody like me*.

Through the years, I have loved the idea of evolving, maturing, and developing as an artist. But it's been the same DNA through all my music. I believe "The Wanderer" and "Ruby Baby" are truly

blues songs if you really listen to them.

People want to say, “You reinvented yourself” or “You re-created yourself.” I didn’t create myself in the first place, so how would I re-create myself? I simply evolved. I matured as a person. My character and identity changed when I found God. I became more comfortable in the world, with a different focus on a Higher Reality. But like my dear friend Bob Dylan said, “So it is with music, it is of a time but also timeless; a thing with which to make memories and the memory itself. Though we seldom consider it, music is built in time as surely as a sculptor or welder works in physical space. Music transcends time by living within it.”

I evolved through time—not just my songwriting and my artistic approach to music, but my mind as well. I stopped caring so much about how people viewed me and started truly caring how God viewed me. My music and my life became intrinsic and eternal. I matured. I stopped trying to change the world and everybody in it, and I changed myself. The entire time, it was an inside job!

9.

My Favorite Rock Writer

"I got a woman who really wants me and another who wants me gone . . ."

If you're serious about rock music, the name "Dave Marsh" means something to you. He defines rock journalism the way Red Smith and Roger Angell defined baseball journalism. He was the great voice of *Rolling Stone* magazine's heyday. He remains the authoritative voice on rock talk radio. He's a voice I take with the utmost seriousness.

So he knocked the wind out of me, one day in 2010, when he and I were talking on camera for an oral-history project at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. He offered the opinion that I am the only first-generation Rock 'n' Roll artist who was on the charts in 1958 who has remained creative and relevant through the decades and up to today. In 1958, I had three Top 40 hits. In 2007, I was nominated for a Grammy.

When I tried to argue with him (a pointless exercise—don't try this at home), Dave upped the ante and said my last three albums had been my strongest.

When I got home, I was feeling pretty good about all this, so I told my wife, Susan, who is almost impossible to impress.

And she replied, "So what are you going to do next?"

I wanted to accept Dave's words as a laurel. Susan repackaged them as a dare.

All this took place around the same time I was writing my memoir, *Dion: The Wanderer Talks Truth*. So I was spending a lot of

time thinking about my deepest roots and influences—in the blues, classic country, and early rock.

It's hard for me to describe what happened next. I can only tell you that these small conversations launched the most creative period of songwriting in my life. Every morning, it seems, I woke up with a new tune running through my head—and the music wouldn't leave me alone. What's more, the tunes rocked. Yeah, they were rootsy, but not with a Golden Oldies kind of nostalgia. They were relevant. Some of them—like "Ride's Blues," my tribute to Robert Johnson—scared me, they seemed so timeless.

I drove the crew at the studio crazy. I had planned an album that was maybe half originals and half covers. But I kept ripping things up to make room for the new material as I wrote it. I had planned to work with a band, but I found that the guitar work in my head needed to get out through *my* fingers—not someone else's.

So that's what you've got here. *Tank Full of Blues*. It's the work I considered the crown of my career at the time. It's work I couldn't keep inside. It's work that was burning in me till I got it out.

Thanks to Dave Marsh for getting it started. Thanks to Susan for making it a dare. Thanks to all of Rock 'n' Roll's better angels who inspire us artists. Thanks be to God, who gave us bodies that respond to a backbeat.

Since then I recorded an album called *New York Is My Home. Blues with Friends* was #1 throughout 2020 on the blues charts. *Stomping Ground* also went to #1 on the blues charts.

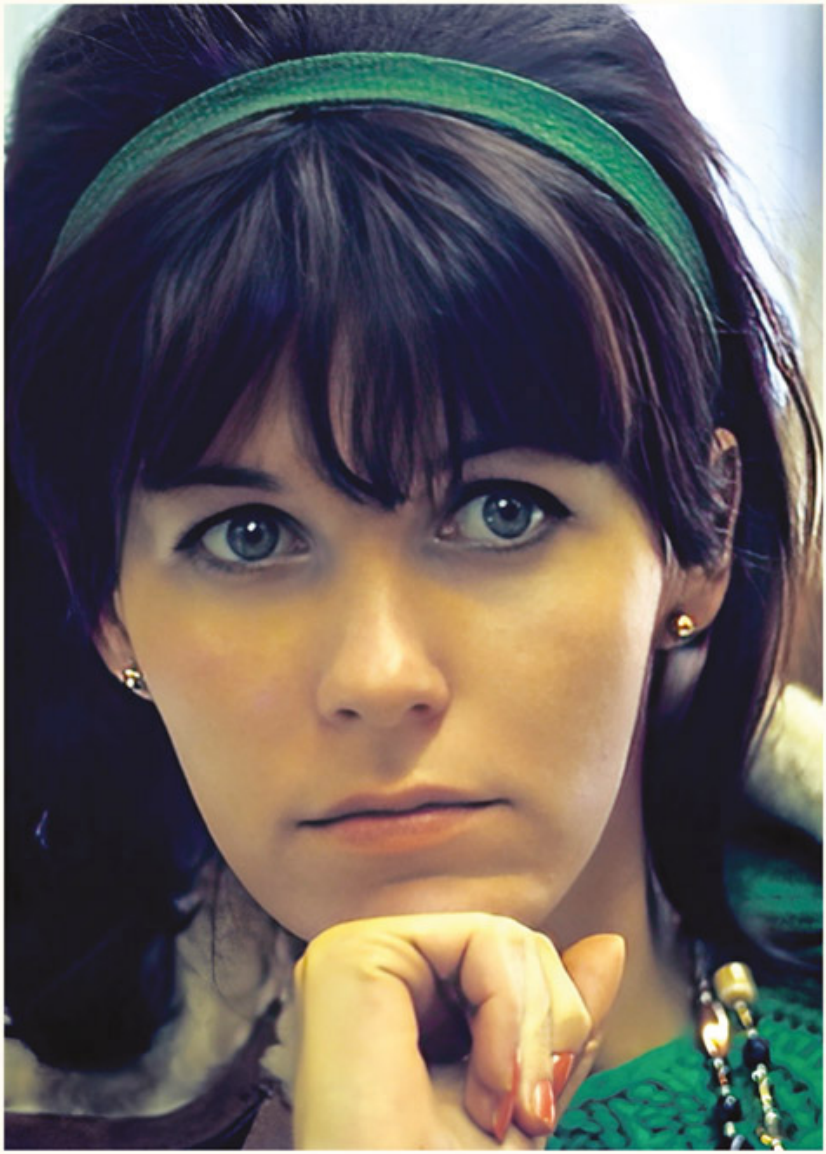
"Now, what am I going to do next?"

I've always wanted to sing with Stevie VanZandt's band "The Disciples of Soul" and their amazing background vocalists; Jessie Wagner, Sara Devine, and Tania Jones. Here I am at The American Honor Awards for the Bruce Springsteen Foundation. A dream come true.

10.
Runaround Sue

"HERE'S THE MORAL AND THE STORY FROM THE GUY WHO KNOWS.
I FELL IN LOVE, AND MY LOVE STILL GROWS."

"Adam, people always ask me if my wife, Susan DiMucci, is the girl in 'Runaround Sue.' Yes and no. I was so insecure when I was sixteen and met her. Susan was fifteen. I never knew they grew anything as beautiful as Susan in Vermont—she captured my heart. We were at the famous annual Italian Feast right on Arthur Avenue. Sue was getting ice cream, and some guy asked her for directions. I saw her talking to this stranger, and I took it as a threat—I got jealous. I was like, *Yo, I got girls lined around the block who want to be with me*."



Susan

Dion shook his head, laughing at the memory all these years later.

On *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, talking about long-lasting love, Susan told Oprah, “The truth is, I had just met him. I had moved from Vermont into the Bronx, New York City, into the middle ages

—into the Italian ghetto. I didn't know any better—or the code of ethics. They kind of claim you once they have talked to you. Well, one day, I was talking to somebody else who was asking for directions to the Bronx Zoo . . . and, instead of talking to me and telling me he was unhappy or jealous, Dion wrote 'Runaround Sue.'"

Susan DIMucci on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, 1980.

My Susan in Central Park, 1960.

“All attitude, on the street corner. Here I am—what do you want to know?”

Our wedding day, March 25, 1963, at The Sherry Netherland Hotel on Fifth Avenue, New York City

"I remember saying, 'Yo, I thought we were together.'

"Susan said, 'We are.'

"I thought of changing the name, but you can't call it 'Runaround Roberta' . . . it's just not the same."

Dion and I both laughed.

"The truth is, she gave me permission to record it. Susan said, 'It's a good song—put it out.'

"She was right."

Dion and Susan have been married for sixty-one years.

Dion and Susan—17 and 15 years old, respectively.

Dion and Susan, October 2015, hanging out at South Street Seaport.

Sixty-one years of marriage

11.

Detaching with Love

"If I knew all the answers, I'd win a Nobel prize, but I'm content to know they lie behind Susan's eyes."

"Adam, in the beginning of 1968, I was in the bleakest, darkest emotional period of my life. I had a soul sickness. I was blaming people for where I was at in life. February rolled in, and it was freezing in New York. I was one irritable, restless, and discontented artist. I was deeply disappointed when Columbia Records didn't release my album, *Kickin' Child*."

He had reason to be disappointed. The album was one of his best, and it was sitting in a vault. *Kickin' Child* was eventually released in 2017 and won the notice it deserved from critics. It took fifty years, but better late than never.

Dion went on: "I was depressed, and then my dearest friend Frankie Lymon died of an overdose. Frankie and I were close and would run the city streets of New York together. His death frightened me and made me think: *I have my own mortality*. There was a lot of confusion and frustration in my heart. But, right at that time, I was about to go on a mini-tour down south—Tennessee, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama. So, I brought Susan and our first baby girl down to North Miami to snuggle in with her parents while I was on the road."

I moved my salad to the side, fully engaged in the story.

"I wasn't enjoying the tour the way I used to, because of my

drinking, drugging, and state of mind. I was lost. I wanted a fresh start. I called Susan from the hotel and said, 'Let's move to Florida,' in a desperate attempt to make a change in my life. Susan knew the shape I was in. She knew that I didn't have a clear head and that my wanting to move to Florida wasn't well thought out.

"Susan started to confide to her father the truth about my drinking, drug use, and erratic ways. She shared with him that I was all over the place, not trustworthy, and that now I wanted to relocate to the Sunshine State."

Dion took a sip of his iced tea and shook his head, remembering the moment.

"Her father asked Susan directly, 'Susan, what do *you* want to do?' That was the game-changer. At that point, Susan thought only of what *I* wanted to do. This opened her eyes. She said to her father, 'I'd really like to stay here in Florida.' That night, her father took her to a twelve-step recovery meeting. Susan shared what was going on in her life, how she was coping. A wonderful woman pulled her aside and taught her the essential concept of 'Detaching with Love'—a proven way of dealing with addicts like me.

"First, express your love for him.

"Second, admit you're powerless and cannot help him.

"Third, tell him there is a place that knows the solution.

"Fourth, excuse yourself from the situation.

"That woman taught her to say these four things like a broken record. She was told to just keep repackaging it, over and over. So, when I finally got back to South Florida from this tour, Susan had changed. She was different. She'd been going to this recovery group. She'd been getting stronger with more knowledge and courage on how to deal with my addiction.

"It made me crazy. I was puzzled. I demanded to know what was going on.

"I asked her, 'Are you going to these meetings and talking about me?' She would shake her head and lovingly say, 'No, Dion . . . I'm going to these meetings for me. I have problems.' "

Dion opened his eyes in amazement. "Adam, I didn't even know there was anybody else in the room, let alone people with problems."

Dion positioned his body upright, mocking his younger self

"You're not allowed to have problems! I'm the one with problems! I'm the one in need of help here. Poor me. The record

label screwed me. My bandmates are lazy. My closest friend died. The tour sucked." Dion started whining like a baby. "W*aaaaa waaaaa waaaaa*."

"Adam, you want to know what whining is? A resentment pushed through a very small hole. *Waaaaa. Waaaaa. Waaaaa. Poor me!"*

We both started to laugh.

"Who knew other people had problems? In my selfish state of mind, I kept going after Susan, trying to bring her attention back to me. I blamed and accused . . . *'You never . . . You should . . . You always . . .'* I was relentless. . . . But Adam, she was a true spiritual warrior. She never went off script, always sharing and re-sharing the four essential concepts of detaching with love."

Dion raised his pointer finger, showing me the number one. "Dion, I love you. I adore you. I'm not the enemy."

Then he raised two fingers. "I thought I could help you, but I found out I can't. I thought I had the power to make you understand what I was saying. I found out I don't. I'm powerless."

He raised three fingers. "But thank God there's a place that understands the problem and has the solution."

Now, D raised four fingers. "Excuse me, I need to get the orange juice."

It sounded so simple, but it was brilliant.

"The next day, it happened again. I'd attack her verbally for some small thing, and . . . 'Dion, I adore you. I have no power to help you. Isn't that frustrating? But there is a fellowship that can show you the way out of your problem. Excuse me, I have to get the eggs.'"

Dion lightly slapped the table, smiling, replaying it in his mind.

"Adam, Susan was my only link to sanity. I couldn't take it. By the end of the week, I went to my first twelve-step meeting. I was finally on the road to recovery. I always say Susan drove me sane."

My beautiful Susan, Battery Park, New York, 2012.

My Susan and I coming home after a date, in our teens.

12.

B.E.S.T (Bless, Edify, Share, Touch)

“Hey D, when did you get married?”

“Susan and I got married on March 25, 1963. It was the Feast of the Annunciation—when the archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be giving birth to the Son of God, and that God himself was the father.”

“Amazing! How many years did you know Susan before you got married?”

“I knew her seven years. We met in the neighborhood when we were very young. I fell madly in love with her. I was so taken with her. But I had no idea how to be a husband. Not the slightest! My father was an emotional thirteen-year-old. He never could hold down a job. He wasn’t a good example of being a father and, more importantly, a husband. He was so needy. He needed to be taken care of.”

“So how did you learn how to be such a good husband, dad, and grandfather?”

“I learned it over the years from a well-known doctor, while I grew with Susan. I like to use the acronym B.E.S.T. It’s the four things I believe wives wish their husbands knew.

“Let’s start with the B. Bless your wife, and how you do that is

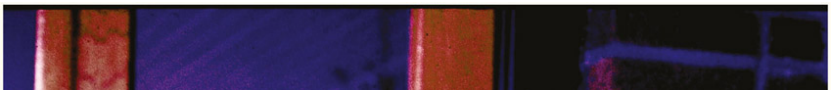
by encouraging, affirming, loving, and complimenting her. Not only publicly—it's easy to do publicly. It's easy to do it at dinner and mention what a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother Susan is. But privately to tell her, 'You're beautiful. You make my life sublime. I adore you. You're a wonderful, remarkable woman—wife, mother, grandmother.' I compliment her when we're alone. I tell her how beautiful she is. Women need to hear it!

"The E stands for edifying. I encourage Susan, physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally. I lift her up. I will her good. I help her reach her potential by wonderful words. Words are so important. They have a great effect on my three daughters and my wife. Women love to hear beautiful things—that they have strong minds, and they are wonderful people, and I am proud of them. I don't think husbands or fathers know just how important words are. And, gestures, too. When your child walks into the room and it takes your breath away—recognize their presence, and let them know how their beauty affects the atmosphere in the room. It's wonderful to acknowledge that with your loved ones.

"The S in B.E.S.T. is to share honestly with your wife. I even share my fears. I'm honest about who I am and where I am in my life. I'm open. You can't be posing and making your spouse think you're something you're not. That's not a marriage. That's insanity. So be open and honest with your wife. Share your fears, joys, struggles, dreams. It's a partnership, and you have to be open ... and be a good listener. That's very important. Be a good listener. Don't jump in and try to fix everything. Women need to be heard.

"The T is for touch. Physical touch. A loving touch. Give your wife a back rub, or hug her. Not for sex, but for love. Not being self-centered with it. It just means a lot. Touch her tenderly.

"I think these four things are important. B.E.S.T. really sums it up. There are probably other things you can do, but this is a good start. It's worked for me for sixty-one years."



Susan and Mojo.

Susan, Dion, and daughter Tane at Disney World.

13.

Three Short Stories That Changed My Life

1. Jack Butterfield, my father-in-law

In February 1968, I had just moved down to North Miami from the Bronx, New York City, to stay with my father-in-law, Jack Butterfield. He owned a very modest house with his wife, Midge, in North Miami. I was twenty-eight years old at the time.

This morning, I was at his home having breakfast with him, and he began sharing with me the idea and benefit of having God or a Higher Power in your life. Jack would tell me that, when you're not connected to a Higher Power, all the pressure of life is on you to figure everything out. Now, I'm a New Yorker—suspicious, critical, cynical, argumentative—all the while thinking that Jack had an angle. But I must say, looking back, all the pressure of life *was* on me, and I was trying to figure everything out on my own.

The following day, he invited me to visit him at his workplace, The Balmoral Country Club. Jack was the acting manager of this prestigious, high-end, private country club right on Miami Beach. He single-handedly ran the entire operation. I met him there for lunch. We ate and talked, and he showed me around the gorgeous country club. We went out and were standing on the front steps of the entrance, facing a driveway that seemed maybe a half a mile

long, with royal palms lining the periphery and middle island down the center. A white Mark IV Lincoln Continental drove right up to the steps where Jack and I were standing. A couple got out of the car . . . they must've been in their mid-forties. They walked right up to Jack, crying with joy and thanking him for helping their son Michael, who they said was now in college. He'd been sober for two years and had totally changed. They thanked him profusely for how respectful Michael was to them now and to everyone he meets. He turned out to be a beautiful young man, and they were so grateful, thankful, and emotional. Then, I couldn't believe my eyes. The couple extended their arms with the keys of the Mark IV Lincoln Continental and offered it to Jack. "Jack, we just bought this car for you in appreciation for what you've done for our son Michael and us."

Jack looked at the keys and said, "I can't take that car. This gift of life and freedom was given to me freely, and I pass it on freely. I cannot take anything for it."

Well, I was beside myself! I did not know what was going on, but he refused that car. They begged him to take it, but, again, he gracefully refused it. I was certainly puzzled by that gesture and what had just happened in front of me. I'd never experienced anything like that in the Bronx . . . or anywhere else.

When we decided to drive back to his place, on the way there, he explained to me that this Spiritual 12-Step Program has taken a corporate vow of poverty. They do not take anybody's donations of more than $200 a year, and you cannot leave anything in your will to this fellowship. Now, I knew, in the Catholic Church I grew up in, that individuals like Saint Francis of Assisi had taken a personal vow of poverty, but never had I heard of a corporation taking a vow of poverty. I started seeing that he didn't have an agenda—a monetary agenda or a prestige thing going on—so I began trusting and opening up to Jack. I started listening to him in a different way. He didn't care—he didn't want anything from me! He was sharing from his heart. The language of the heart. He just wanted me to experience what he'd experienced—truth, serenity, peace, and beauty. Adam, thank God in some small way, but I became willing to listen. That little spark of desiring to be open changed my life.

Jack Butterfield, 1968.

2. CHANGING A FLAT TIRE

In 1974, I was having lunch with a friend in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and feeling very depressed—which was rare for me, because I'm not a depressed kind of person. I don't have a history of depression. I felt heavy, like my feet were stuck in quicksand. I had no motivation at all. Everything was slow, and I felt like there was a black cloud over my head. I had no idea what it was or how to get rid of it. I was talking to my friend, and he said, "Dion, why don't you do some service? Start thinking of others, and, in doing for others, it'll get you out of yourself."

Dion at Walt Grace Vintage Cars and Guitars in Miami.

Doing something nice for somebody was the last thing on my mind. I didn't even feel like getting out of my chair. So, we finished our lunch and conversation. I thanked him, got in my car, and headed home. As I approached the entrance to the turnpike there in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, I spotted this car on the side of the road with a flat tire and these four elderly people standing outside of the car, on the curb, looking very bewildered and forlorn. They looked so lost (there were no cell phones at the time), and they didn't have a clue about what to do. I pulled over, got out of my car, walked up to them, and asked if they needed any help—if they would like me to change the tire. They said, "Yes."

Honestly, the last thing in the world I felt like doing was fixing a flat tire. But, I grabbed the jack and the spare tire out of the trunk of the car. I examined the spare, and it was in pretty good shape. Then, I got into the car, placed it in "Park," put the emergency brake on, got out, and proceeded to jack the car up. I took the nuts off the flat, changed the tire, and secured the spare by tightening all the bolts, then I placed the hubcap on the wheel—all good and perfect.

They were delighted and very grateful. They wanted to give me three dollars! I said,"No, that's not necessary—just drive safely and have a good day."

Off they went.

I don't know how this stuff works, but I've never been depressed since. Also, something funny happened when I got home. This neighbor of mine, who I always considered very homely and boring, all of a sudden became much better-looking and unbelievably interesting. It was like she'd been transformed in front of my eyes! My mind opened a little. I started to feel, believe, and see things I never experienced. I wasn't so closed down, judgmental, and needing to be in control of everything.

I felt lighter. Fully alive."

3. My Disney World Trip

In 1985, my wife, Susan, told me over a morning cup of coffee that

she would like me to drive and accompany her to Disney World three weeks from that day. Her friend Carolyn's daughter was getting married at Disney World, where they have a chapel. They had invited 200 people and were expecting everybody to join them there for the celebration. My response was, "I don't know your friend. I don't know her daughter or her friends. . . . I don't know anybody who's going , so I'm not going."

That afternoon, I was talking to my friend Mac. I was telling him the story, that I was not going to this wedding. "I don't know these people!"

He said to me, "Why don't you go for your wife!"

It landed in such a way, that I thought—*what a novel idea*! I decided to take him up on that.

When I got home, I told Susan, "I've changed my mind, and I'd love to take you to Disney World."Well, we asked our daughter Tane, who was nineteen at the time and on a college break, to come along. Now, I'm going to keep it short and sweet.

It was one of the best trips I've ever experienced.

I laughed and felt wonderful driving all the way to Disney World with my wife and daughter. We had a great time at the wedding. Susan, my daughter Tane, and I laughed all night, right up until bedtime, and had a glorious, fun drive back home. I would've missed it all if I hadn't gone for Susan.

I think a headache is when God is trying to stretch a very small mind from being self-centered to other-people-centered.

14.

Center of My Life

"In this world, there's a train bound for glory.
Get aboard, and I'll tell you a story."

Author's note: This is my personal favorite story of Dion's. It's not his performing with the biggest names in music. It's not when he and his wife Susan were on Oprah Winfrey *together. It's not his being inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Class of 1989 with the Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder, and Otis Redding. It's not all the gold records that hang on his wall. No. It's what I refer to as* The Jog. *Without* The Jog, *I would not have met him—my spiritual father—back in 1987, when I was eleven years old.*

We tell the story of this supernatural event not to make you believe what we believe, but to show that all things are possible with God. Saul of Tarsus was on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus when he was blinded by the ascended Jesus and had his conversion, becoming the Apostle Paul. Bill Wilson, the co-founder of twelve-step recovery, had a profound white-light experience in Towns Hospital on December 14, 1934, that filled him with God's ecstasy and freed him from alcohol forever. In today's age, many people are looking for these experiences, experimenting with hallucinogens such as Mother Ayahuasca, DMT, and mushrooms. This is Dion's incident that deeply and profoundly affected his life, and mine.

Dion and I were driving down to the Gold Coast Railroad Museum in Miami to shoot a video for his single, "Blues Comin' On."

"Adam, do you know what gives something its value? What gives something its worth?"

I shook my head. "No."

"The scarcity of it. The uniqueness. If I found a precious rock, and it was the only one of its kind on the planet, it would be worth a lot of money."

I nodded my head in understanding. "Yeah, like a rare antique or painting."

Dion pointed at me. "Exactly. Well, we each have our own unique DNA. We are each a distinct, one-of-a-kind, creation of God. However, there's a big difference between our unique, distinct identity and where we get our significance."

"How do you mean?"

D readjusted himself in his seat. I knew this was about to get good.

"Adam, back in the late 1970s, I made an album called *Fire in the Night* with my new band, Streetheart. I had a lot riding on this record, and it turned out to be difficult to make because everyone in the band had their own opinions. Then in 1979, when it was finally complete, Columbia Records acquired a new president who rearranged personnel and direction. In that chaos, *Fire in the Night* got shelved."

My eyes opened widely.

"It was a very frustrating time for me. My career was in flux. I felt like an aging Rock 'n' Roller. I was eleven years clean and sober in recovery. I had the nice house, the girl of my dreams—Susan—three beautiful daughters, twelve gold records on the wall, and money in the bank, but something was missing."

Something . . . was . . . missing.

"Adam, sometimes *God will give you what you want in order to show you what you need*. Still, something was missing; something was wrong. I remember sharing my disheartenment with a friend who kindly gave me a Keith Green album titled *For Him Who Has Ears to Hear*. There was a big Jesus movement back then, and Keith Green, a contemporary Christian musician, was very popular. I loved the song, "Until Your Love Broke Through" and couldn't get it out of my head. I listened it to it over and over again." Dion started

singing me the lyrics, "*Like waking up from the longest dream / how real it seemed until your love broke through / I've been lost in a fantasy that blinded me until your love broke through."*

Dion leaned slightly toward the steering wheel. "December 14, 1979. I remember it like yesterday. Back then, I ran a six-mile loop every morning. With the new album shelved and my career in limbo, a lot of my character defects started flaring up. My insides were like a bowl of mush. I had Keith Green's "Until Your Love Broke Through" playing in my head. As I was jogging, like every other morning, Adam, I said ten simple words."

I was chomping at the bit.

"God, it would be nice to be closer to You."

Dion turned to me slowly and motioned his hands symbolizing an explosion. "It's very hard to explain what happened next. It was sudden, brilliant, and profound. *Booooooom!*—a white light went off in the pit of my chest and came out of every pore of my being. This beautiful, ethereal figure appeared in front of me. It was Jesus Christ. He appeared with arms outstretched. I ran right into Him. I suddenly heard a loud *bang!* behind me, like a giant oak tree had fallen. I looked back, and nothing was there. Yet, I knew that sudden bang was my old self. I felt lighter, like a 200-pound weight had fallen off my back. I was reborn!

"Adam, I don't think I've ever experienced love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace as I did in that moment. The whole world turned vivid Technicolor. I've never been the same."

Dion hit my arm, the emotion and enthusiasm in the car pulsing.

"D, that's amazing! What did you do?"

Dion put the car back into "Drive" and put both hands on the wheel, laughing to himself. "I ran home and told Susan that Jesus was alive! She said to me, 'Who doesn't know that?' So, in disbelief, I asked, 'Why didn't you tell me?'"

I giggled. "What did she say?"

He grinned and scratched his chin. "She said, 'Yeah, like you're gonna believe me.'"

I could hear Susan saying that in my mind.

"Adam, I've never been the same since. And here's something even more mysterious and inspiring. The more I changed, the more I became myself. From that day forward, I found my significance outside the music industry. I found my significance outside my looks and generation. I wasn't an aging rock 'n" roller. I was a child

of God, and he loved me forever!”

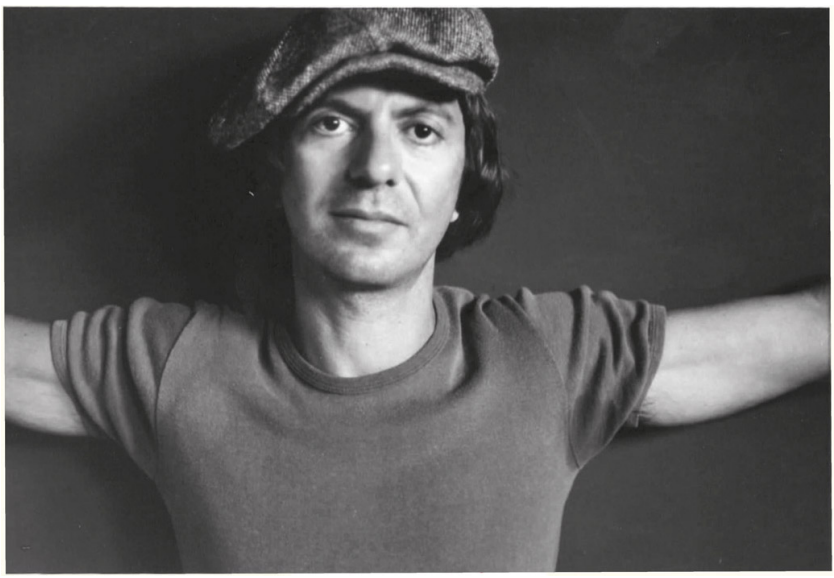
Dion, Miami Marathon, 1979. The year of *The Jog!*

Dion—Working on sketches for the "Abraham, Martin, and John" album. Hollandale Beach, 1969.

Dion and his four girls posing in 1980.

I stared at my mentor in awe. His spirituality permeated the car.

"I had it all upside down. I was doing all this *stuff* to get *there."* Dion motioned his hands as if climbing up a staircase or the rungs of a ladder. "After my spiritual awakening, I was *there*, and it allowed me to do all the *stuff*. I became people-centered rather than self-centered. I went on to record five gospel albums. The album *I Put Away My Idols* got nominated for a Grammy. Adam, that's when I met you."



Dion and Stevie Van Zandt, the musical consultant for the broadway show, *The Wanderer*.

15.

Reverse a Decision

"I'M CRYING OUT, 'LORD, PLEASE SAVE MY SOUL!'"

Dion and I were driving down to Fort Lauderdale on a mission—to find the perfect location to shoot the video for "Way Down (I Won't Cry No More)." It's a classic blues song Dion wrote for his *Billboard* #1 album titled *Blues with Friends*. On this track, Dion's voice is backed up by the guitar of Stevie Van Zandt—also known as "Little Steven" or "Miami Steve"—best known as Bruce Springsteen's loyal sidekick in the E Street Band, but also for his timeless role on *The Sopranos* as Silvio Dante.

We wanted to find a New York City / urban setting to capture the song's vibe. As we drove across the Sunrise Boulevard Bridge in Fort Lauderdale, an empty blues nightclub just off the exit brought back a memory to Dion.

"Adam, years ago, my heart was locked up inside a vault. One night, I was about to play a gig up in New York in a club that looked just like that." Dion pointed to the bar. "It was about two hours till showtime and this *fear-thing* just came over me. This numb feeling. I felt kind of paralyzed, like I knew something was wrong."

I shook my head. "What did you do?"

As we exited off the bridge past the nightclub onto Las Olas

Boulevard, Dion adjusted his sunglasses. “A woman who I know from church is a psychologist, and I have a great respect for her faith and knowledge. So, I gave her a ring. I explained what I was experiencing and that I was about to work. I asked point blank, ‘What do you think this could be? I’ve been performing since I was sixteen years old.’ ”

“What did she say?”

“She told me that I cared too much about what people thought of me. I told her that I thought she was wrong. I didn’t care about approval. I had detached from the need for approval. I had unplugged from the approval machine. I had wanted approval at one point, but that was not what this was.”

“Wow! What did she reply to that?”

Dion brushed his goatee lightly with his index finger and smiled.

“She said that caring what people think about you is something totally different from approval.”

I didn’t get that at all. “How?” I was curious.

“That’s exactly what I asked! She answered, ‘Maybe something traumatic happened when you were a kid.’”

“Go on . . .” I had to hear this.

“I told her I knew what had happened to me. I come from a huge Italian family. When I was seven years old, I was sitting around the table with my uncles, who were electricians, engineers, firefighters, and police officers. Great guys . . . but they were all putting my father down while I was sitting there. You see, my father, who had tremendous qualities, never worked. He was an artist and a man of creativity, but he never had a real job. They were putting him down, all in one accord and laughing at him. It wasn’t like one uncle—it was the entire family.”

I knew an amazing lesson was being taught to me. I stared at my mentor.

“It affected me. Somewhere in my psyche, I felt like . . . *Nobody is ever going to treat me like this or say those things about me . . . I’ll punch their lights out!* So, the drive to be number one and do something great was on.”

“What did this woman say to that, D?”

He grinned from ear to ear. “She said, ‘That’s all well and good; that’s good self-knowledge. But that won’t help you.’ Adam, at that moment, she had me get on my knees and talk to God—as I understood him. I said, ‘Lord, I made a decision, below the level of

consciousness, at seven years old. I swore an oath to Heaven. I vowed an oath to you, Lord, that *nobody* would ever talk like that about me.' You get that? A seven-year-old was running my life."

I sat back, thinking about my own decisions as a child. I wondered if they were still guiding my thoughts and actions.

"On my knees, I humbly asked God to help me reverse my decision that I had made at seven years old. The decision that nobody was ever going to treat me like a joke—that decision was dominating me all my life. I asked Him to please take my heart out of the vault. I gave it back to Him to heal it and do what He will . . . I said, 'Make me whole, Lord. I want to serve you with a free and unbound heart, and feel your love.'"

I was taking the moment in. Although this had happened to Dion, *I* felt liberated.

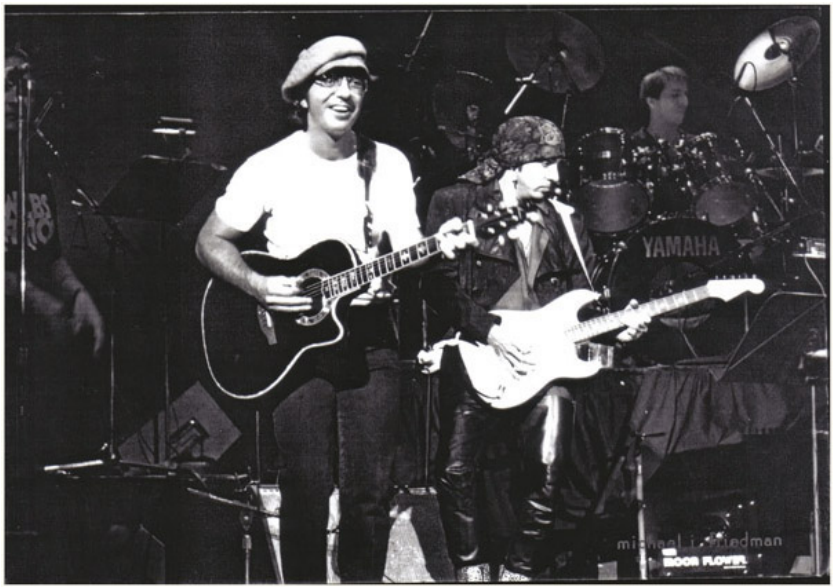
"From that moment on, I never felt I had to live up to anybody's expectations. I never felt obligated to anyone. I knew the true meaning of *being free*. All I had to do was be right with Him, and great events would happen for me and countless others. This is the great fact."

Dion glanced over at me and nodded with a gaze of great peace. "This is *the freedom of excellence*."

That evening, I reviewed my life. In the car ride with Dion, I remembered that, at seven years old, I decided to be the peacemaker of the family—people-pleasing. It was a burden that I had not been able to fully shed. It bled into all my relationships—the decision that I had to be Superman and fix everything for everybody. I was dying to be free of this once and for all.

So, I followed my mentor's lead. I got on my knees, and I humbly asked God to reverse my decision that I'd made as a little boy. That decision had been dominating me all my life. I humbly asked God to please take my heart out of the vault. I gave it back to Him to heal it and do what He will . . . I said, "Make me whole, Lord. I want to serve you with a free and unbound heart, and feel your love." I could hear Dion in my head: *Adam, this is the freedom of excellence.*

Dion, Progresso Village, 2020.



Dion with Stevie Van Zandt, Radio City Music Hall, 1998.

With Dion and Stevie Van Zandt in New York City, 2019.

Dion with Maureen and Stevie Van Zandt at *The Wanderer* in New York City.

Stevie Van Zandt and Dion at Stevie's fund-raiser for The Rock and Roll Forever Foundation Gala in Manhattan, 2017.

Dion and me, Progresso Village, 2020.

16.

Attitude, by Stevie Van Zandt

Attitude.

That's where it all begins.

That's the spark that gets somebody out of the crowd and onto a stage. That's the spark that the kid recognizes and relates to when he buys that somebody's record.

Rock 'n' roll is the only art form truly born of rebellion. And that rebellion is *attitude*. In the late fifties and early sixties, Dion embodied that attitude.

Not quite the Elvis good ol' boy, or James Dean angst—although there was some of that.

It was more like Brando's *Wild One*, but that was still too country.

No, this was new for rock 'n' roll.

Pure Bronx—New York—Italian—street gang—wiseguy *attitude*.

His street gang was the Belmonts, and the records were "I Wonder Why" and "That's My Desire."

They were part doo-wop, part R&B, part bluesy, and part, uh . . . *attitude*. Very original, actually.

They basically produced themselves—uncredited, of course—and the records they made emphasized a unique combination of black-and-white style. Dion told me the reason the vocal parts were unique was partly because they were hearing horn parts but couldn't afford horns. Lucky us.

After the Belmonts, Dion continued to sell millions of records ("Runaround Sue," "The Wanderer," "Ruby Baby"), and regardless of what was transpiring offstage, the attitude remained. It remained for us, the audience. It was still largely show business in those days; the illusion was all that mattered. But somewhere along the way, the spark eventually, inevitably, went out.

What ignites that spark in the first place?

Is it anger? Frustration? Loneliness? The need to communicate? To connect? The search for some inexpressible need? A need, perhaps, to fill an unrecognized emptiness inside? Probably some or all of these demons initially serve to motivate us.

As time goes on, traces of these elements may remain, but the unconscious "attitude" created by them cannot, by itself, sustain anyone forever.

You get five choices.

You die. You burn out. You get out of the business. You go 100 percent into the world of showbiz. Or you realize that you have stumbled into something that really is an art form capable of communicating the most deeply felt self-expression.

Again, lucky us.

After helping to pioneer rock 'n' roll as we know it today, Dion found a way of expressing his deepest, most honest feelings through blues androck and, in doing so, avoided what befell too many of the first- and second-generation rockers—namely bitterness, terminal nostalgia, bankruptcy, busted dreams, or an early death.

I think it is difficult sometimes for the later generations of rockers to appreciate a time when there were no rules, no expectations. Not to mention no luxury buses, no stage monitors to hear yourself, no legal protection, and no artists controlling their own destinies. Just a bunch of street singers regarded by society as degenerate infidels, one small step away from jail or the gutter.

It was this relatively small group of singers, writers, and producers who very often sacrificed everything society told them they needed, including, sometimes, their lives, to create something the world had never felt anybody needed—an international means of communication for young people.

It was, by the way, those sacrifices that enabled those of us in the third and fourth generations to do what we do so naturally. It was the inspiration of the eternal attitude of Dion (and partly the buying into the show-business illusions) that allowed us the

freedom to avoid most of the traps of the business—the "act," the slavery contracts, the drugs, the short-term exploitation, etc.

We live it the way we assumed they lived it. That's why we don't change our clothes to go onstage. Or our attitude.

I thank Dion for that. And I am honored to call him my friend.

I can tell you this—there's a lot more music to come.

Milt Hinton on bass, Dion, and Samuel "Sticks" Evans on drums on the "Ruby Baby" session, 1962.

Having fun in my T-Bird.

Dion—Attitude. 1967.

Dion—*Yo, Frankie!* at Arista Records, 1989.

17.

Dion and Dan Murrow, "The Harlem Crusader"

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1985

That fella kissing me on the head is Dan Murrow—The Harlem Crusader. He was a special human being.

Dan was a social worker with the American Friends Service Community. He moved to Tremont Avenue where my wife, Susan, lived in 1956, eventually moving to 111th Street to Spanish Harlem —where he got his nickname, "The Harlem Crusader."

My neighborhood in the Bronx, for me, was a battleground for gangs, drugs, alcoholism, and getting in trouble. Dan and his wife, Hope, moved there and dedicated their lives to the streets, the problems of the streets. This became his primary purpose. The people of the streets became his family.

He was the real deal. He was great one on one; we would sit on the church steps and talk for an hour or two. He taught me how to have faith in myself and the gifts that God gave me. He actually called God "The Big Man" or "The Boss Man Upstairs"—the one who has a plan for your life.

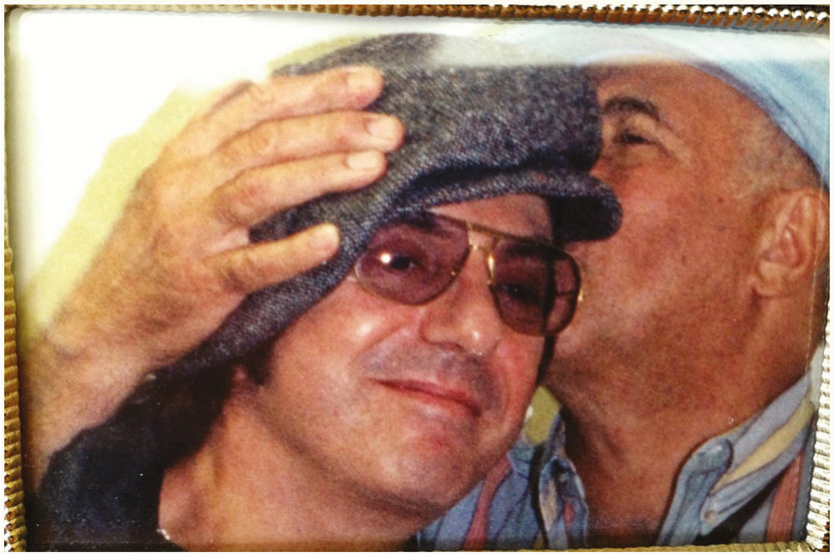
Dan showed up in the Bronx and actually worked with my gang, the Fordham Baldies, and personally led me into wisdom, love, knowledge, and fortitude. After working in the Bronx, he moved to Spanish Harlem, where he worked with three rival gangs, the Young Sinners, the Scorpions, and the Harlem Red Wings.

Dan dedicated himself to getting addicts to kick the heroin habit. He never judged anyone. He always saw your potential. If you were unemployed, he'd find you a job. He knew how to listen to people, to really listen with love and understanding. He truly saw the value in people.

I took to him because he asked questions. I knew that if you don't ask questions, you get stuck. Well, he would ask me questions about the future. He showed me a dream, and he helped me to have incentive. He taught me to *be wise*—not to only *know stuff*. He taught me how to look at myself; he talked about self-control, humility, hard work, and self-sacrifice. He laid the groundwork for me to listen to a guy like Willie Green, who knew much about life and recovery. He also encouraged me and told me that Monsignor Pernicone of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was full of wisdom and should be listened to.

He was himself! *But among really hardass, badass gang members*. He never tried to impress me. Just spoke to me with a quiet authority and prudence. He was born a remarkable man—some people are just born remarkable. He had these bright blue eyes. He could light up the whole neighborhood. They would sparkle when he talked. A beautiful smile, and warm as the day is long. To me he was like the heart of Jesus walking among the gang members in my neighborhood.

It's a wonderful thing to have somebody like that championing your cause and knocking at the door of your soul at a young age. He was a guy who taught me how to change, be teachable, and always be learning, who could reveal truth within me, even in the Bronx that was full of chaos and violence. Like I said, Dan Murrow —The Harlem Crusader—was the real deal, a remarkable man . . . And I guess that's why I'm still around today.



Me and The Harlem Crusader—Dan Murrow. Giving me one of his famous hugs in Boston, Massachusetts, 1985.

18.

The Four Typical Addictions

(Success vs. Fulfillment)

"Thought my image needed a pat on the back.
I thought my ego needed a Cadillac.
There I was sitting in the driver's seat.
I was still feeling down and incomplete. Oh, sweet surrender!"

We were at Trattoria Nonna in Boca Raton. Nonna, the owner, was from Italy and made sure every ingredient was organic and native to her homeland. The head chef and co-owner is known for his impeccable attention to detail in creating the most authentic Italian dishes. The culture, the intimate decor, and the welcome made us feel like we were in Stivale or Little Italy in New York.

I was gaining some momentum in my field and starting to get noticed by some big names who wanted me to help them in their lives.

"D, when did you feel successful?"

"Adam, I thought success would do it for me. I thought success would cover for being a good father, husband, and friend. I thought if I had the money, the girl—my Susan—the car, the career, with twelve gold records on the wall, then everybody would love me. But it doesn't work like that, because success and fulfillment are two different things."

Success and fulfillment are two different things.

"God created us in such a way to work well only when we're in union with Him. The most courageous thing a man can do is open his heart to his creator. We all have this longing in our heart, and we look in all the wrong places to fill that longing. Bruce Springsteen wrote, *Everybody's got a hungry heart*. That song is echoing what Saint Augustine said: The heart is restless until it comes to rest in God alone. But we look in all the wrong places to fill this emptiness."

I was instantly transported to the year 1981 in Tenafly, New Jersey. I was a young boy in my mom's old light-blue station wagon, listening to Bruce Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" on Z-100. Then came a flashback to middle school, learning about Saint Augustine and his famous conversion experience in the garden. Dion always connected the dots for me. But not just me . . . everyone he came in contact with. He possessed the most divine ability to teach the most profound, ancient wisdom from the saints and sages but in entertaining and practical ways—combining the lessons with culture, music, and art. I smiled and nodded as he continued.

"We try to fill it with *the four typical addictions*—wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. Yes, the four obvious temptations, the classical addictions, principal substitutes. Adam, *true freedom* is when you're connected to the center and God shapes your desire for these worldly clamors. Having a healthy detachment from these is true freedom. The less faith you have in God, the more political you can become, and so on. . . . The less faith you have in God, the more you will try to fill yourself up with these four worldly attractions. But they will never satisfy the deep longing of your soul. Not that we are puritans and see the world as a bad place! No . . . not at all. The world is a beautiful place, and we're meant to enjoy it *and* be fulfilled. But just read the tabloids. The things of this world are enjoyable but all of them are only temporary. You have people addicted to all kinds of things—alcohol, drugs, sex, food,

shopping, gambling, being right, trying to be better, trying to win, and so on. Seems to me like a lot of people have an abundance of success but also have a spirit of scarcity and are not truly fulfilled."

I sat back, thinking of some of the people I loved most in my life. Sadly, they had all the possessions money could buy and were still restless, irritable, and discontented. They got all they ever wanted; they found all the pleasures in life, but it always wore off. So, then, they needed more of it. They sought more and more and more. They became "More-Aholics." (I talked about this tendency in my book *Lotsaholic*.) I, too, had that spirit of scarcity Dion was talking about and could never be fulfilled unless I found the center. Unless I gave the glory to God and allowed Him to reshape my desires for the greatest good.

"There's nothing wrong with achievement, but if your motives are wrong, it can be disastrous! If your motives are selfish, self-centered, inconsiderate, dishonest, or coming from fear, God won't bless your actions. Even worse, sometimes God will give you exactly what you want—all the desires of your heart, to show you what it gets you. If we don't have a wise and discerning heart, these worldly riches, possessions, and power will destroy us. Many times, we end up empty, wondering what's wrong. Without a relationship with our Creator, what's the point?

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Dion said firmly. "Honestly putting your effort into a project and leaving the results to God works for me. I don't know what the future holds, but I know I'm in the hands of the One who holds the future."

There was an amazing transformative power from my conversations with my older and wiser mentor. His words were like a powerful boost—giving me the confidence to be . . . myself! It's like being with a shepherd. He guides me, guards me, and helps govern me. He taught me how to trust God and keep first things first.

Dion and Bruce Springsteen hanging out in Manhattan, when Bruce came to listen to my new album, *Street Heart*, 1976.

Dion and Bruce Springsteen in Marz Bar in Long Branch, New Jersey, with Joe Grushecky and Scott Kempner, with the HouseRockers. August 20, 1994.

Dion, Radio City Music Hall, New York City, 1995.

19.

My Mentor

"THE HIGHEST LIFE IS ONE IN THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM, CULTIVATING THE LIFE OF THE MIND."

The best life lessons I learned were passed down to me by my mentor, Dion. He taught me to not go for the crumbs in life—wealth, pleasure, power, and honor (the four typical addictions), to not worship false idols. However, maybe the most powerful lesson was to have the courage to share what was really going in my mind and life, and that we heal in pairs. We sat at his kitchen table after a meeting one day where he helped me out of a situation thatwas troubling my mind.

You know, I found out one of the most important things in my life: Find somebody, someone you can trust completely. It can be a priest, a lawyer, a friend, but find a person that you can tell everything to. Somebody who also knows your strengths—and faults—someone who knows all about you. One of the most important things in my life is not to live life alone. When you're emotionally invested in something, you can't see straight. Like we've discussed many times, it's so important to have an outside reference for your life. To have an advisor. The president has the cabinet. The Pope has the Papal Chapel and the College of Cardinals. Any CEO worth his salt has a right-hand man, an advisor. It's barbaric to do life alone. It's not very smart.

I've had a few mentors in my life. The last one I had for thirty years. We would talk about everything. Every time I went to see him—either over a cup of coffee, a walk on the beach, a meeting in his office, at his home—with a situation that was troubling me—with my wife, kids, money, friends, parents, a record company,

relationships—and attempted to tell him what I was going to do about it, not *once* did he ever say to me, *That's a good idea*.

That's significant! To have somebody be an outside reference for my life, and he could tweak stuff, and it would turn out in a miraculous way. When you have a good mentor, it will come out where it doesn't stir up more trouble; it doesn't offend anybody. It keeps everything grounded and everybody growing. It doesn't incite drama and more problems; it incites thought. It brings people closer to you.

One of the most important lessons he taught me was that love takes courage and work. The courage is leaning in—not running. It's commitment—being devoted, dedicated, loyal, and responsible. The work is listening, getting honest with yourself and taking a look at your own shortcomings—not pointing a finger at anybody and saying, *You ought to, you should, if you'd only . . .* , but edifying the other. St. Thomas Aquinas said *to love is willing the good of another*. That's wanting to see them reach their potential—physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

Another lesson my mentor taught me was how to receive. He said the last stage of humility is learning how to receive—you know, like compliments, gifts, love, and help—gracefully. He taught me to ask for help and say 'thank you' when it was offered. We didn't do that in the Bronx. But you know what? Without my mentor teaching me how to receive gracefully, I would have never asked for help, and I wouldn't have made *Blues with Friends* and *Stomping Ground*—two of the best albums I've ever recorded—with Bruce Springsteen, Eric Clapton, Paul Simon, Van Morrison, Jeff Beck, Little Steven, Patti Scialfa, Billy F. Gibbons, Joe Bonamassa, Rory Block, Samantha Fish, Boz Scaggs, Sonny Landreth, and Peter Frampton, to name a few. And all I had to say was "Thank you!"

Dion, *Stomping Grounds*.

Lou Reed, Bruce Springsteen, Dion, Billy Joel, Rubén Blades at the Paul Simon– organized benefit at Madison Square Garden to raise awareness and money to fight homelessness among New York City's children, December 13, 1987.

Stickball Hall of Fame

My Susan, Paul Simon, and me at Yankee Stadium!

20.

LIFE IS ABOUT GIVING

"New York is calling me
And now I find
The city never sleeps
It's my state of mind."

Dion and I were right on Wall Street in the Financial District in Lower Manhattan. We stopped into a Blue Bottle Coffee and got a delicious cold brew. There was a buzz as we walked by Trinity Church, the New York Stock Exchange, and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York Building. I felt so fortunate to be there with my spiritual father. We walked a few blocks down to the World Trade Center Memorial.

"Adam, life is about giving. The ultimate example of *love* and *heroic virtue* was displayed that day of 9/11. Now when we talk about heroic virtue, what you and I are saying is like the physical muscles are to the body . . . *virtues* are the spiritual muscles for the soul. The policemen, the firemen, the health workers, the priests, and civilians who responded and ran into the World Trade Center after the 9/11 terrorist attacks displayed this heroic virtue. I believe they were not just brave in that moment, but they had been preparing themselves their whole lives for that moment."

Dion then pointed to an airplane flying overhead. "Flight 93 was

hijacked by four Al-Qaeda terrorists who planned to crash the plane into a federal government building in Washington, DC, but four heroes—Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Jeremy Glick, and Tom Burnett—I believe were preparing themselves their entire lives for that instant. The courageous life is not made in just one act. They knew exactly what to do. They displayed integrity, character, honor, and courage."

"That day of 9/11 unified our country. There was so much love, and we all became patriots."

Dion pointed to the Memorial Museum and all the American flags honoring our country, our lost loved ones, our heroes, and our history.

"Adam, you know, my friend Paul Simon is a good demonstration of how we try to give back in a very small way. Here's an example—I was in town to perform at the City Winery for a charity, with my friend Jimmy Vivino, for the 9/11 first responders. I received a call from Paul Simon asking me if I'd like to have lunch with him at Lattanzi Cucina Italiana on West 46th Street, near 8th Avenue. I was free, so I went up to have lunch with him. I love being with Paul—he's very open and interesting. We were in his stomping ground—he knows Eddie, the manager there—so we sat in a private, quiet room in the back and had a two-hour talk about spirituality, life, and music. At the end of the conversation, we discussed how our perceptions and belief system turns into action. That's where and how you see your belief systems—*in relationships and in your actions*.

"On the way back to my apartment, I thought of some good examples of this. Now, mind you, Paul would never mention this, but he uses his celebrity in the best way possible. When New York City was having a downtime, going through a slump, he put a concert together to lift the spirit and the morale of the city. On September 19, 1981, Paul Simon hosted The Central Park Concert on the great lawn—it drew 500,000 people. It was such a thing of beauty; it was sublime. It brought everybody to a place of enchantment."

"Wow, D—500,000 people!" I was in awe.

"Another beautiful example is when he found out how many homeless young children were roaming the streets of the boroughs of New York City. Paul was concerned with the medical attention they were getting. This time, he established the New York

Children's Health Project Benefit Concert on December 13, 1987, at Madison Square Garden, New York. Bruce Springsteen, James Taylor, Billy Joel, Lou Reed, and the New York Yankees, including 'The Captain'—Hall of Fame shortstop Derek Jeter—showed up. It was a huge success and a lot of fun. (I even got to sing 'Teenager in Love' with Paul, Bruce, Lou, James, and Billy.) Paul raised the money to put two medical-unit buses fully equipped with doctors and nurses to go throughout the five boroughs and give *quality* medical attention to *all* these homeless youngsters. My friend Paul Simon is definitely a man of action.

"Here's another great example. He gives back and supports our city with the Stickball Hall of Fame. Now, I fancied myself a pretty good stickball player growing up on the streets of the Bronx, but when Paul and I went up to Spanish Harlem on 109th Street and 3rd Avenue (where he provides for the Stickball Hall of Fame) and the teams up there . . . well, we got into it! Paul and I got into the schoolyard to hit a few pitches. I found out how truly good he is with a bat—man, he keeps his eye on the ball. He is a *great* stickball player. A great New Yorker. A great man.

"Paul Simon truly knows when, where, and *how* to give, although he would be completely embarrassed by me talking about him like this. Paul Simon would just consider himself a very grateful guy who's trying to give back to his home—New York—with great love and appreciation."

The Stickball Hall of Fame

Dion and Paul Simon at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame 25th Anniversary Show

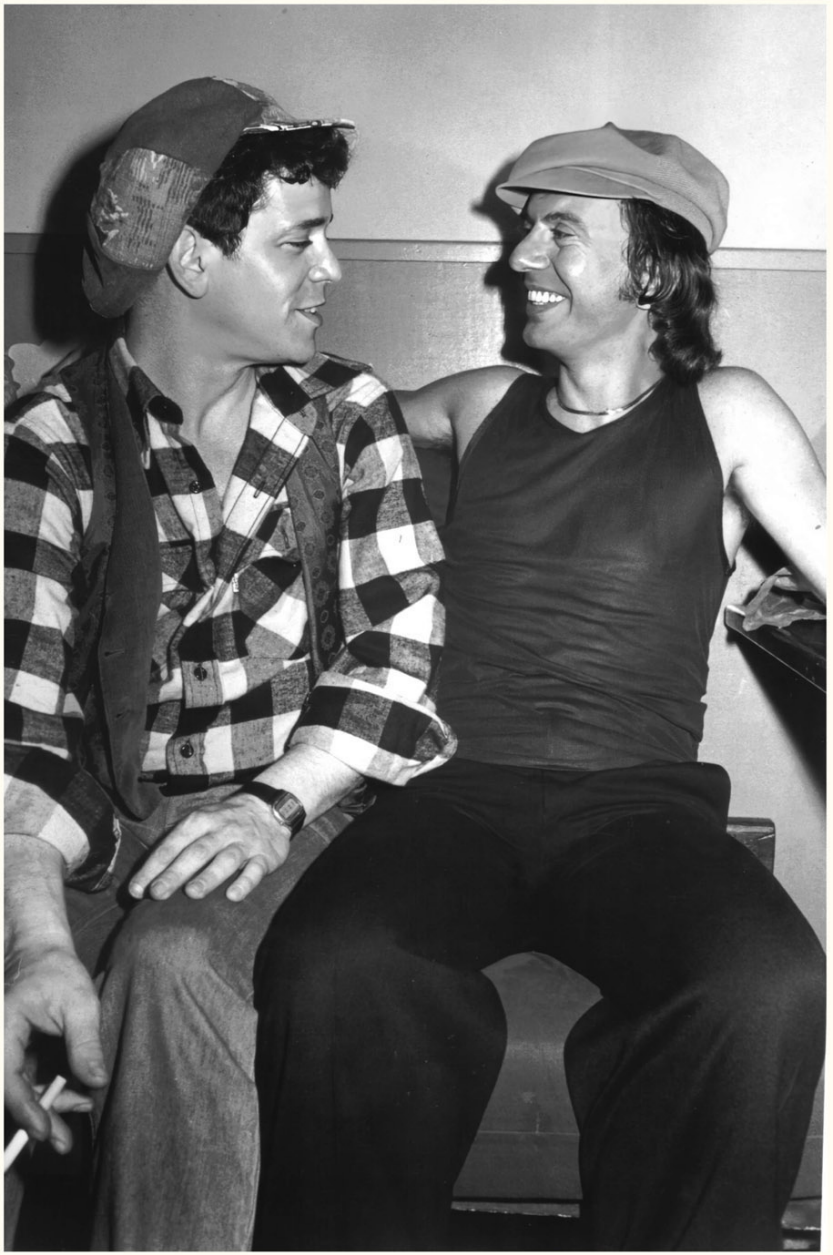
Dion with his backup singers, James Taylor, Billy Joel, Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, and Lou Reed, December 13, 1987. Not in the photo but honorable mention, Chaka Khan, Rubén Blades.

I used to be a Brooklyn Dodger, now a New York Yankee. Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford and Dion.

Dion and Clive Davis at The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony.

Lou Reed inducted Dion into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1989.

DION
THE
ROCK AND ROLL
HALL OF FAME
1989



21.

My Brother, Lou Reed

Dion and I sat down at La Mela's restaurant in Little Italy for a lunch break from rehearsals of the soon-to-be Broadway show—*The Wanderer*.

"D, out of all the amazingly talented friends you have, from Paul Simon to Bruce Springsteen, to Bob Dylan and so on . . . how did Lou Reed come to induct you into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame?"

"Adam, we were brothers, and to be honest with you—Lou asked if he could induct me. Let me elaborate a little on my dear friend Lou Reed. About a week or so before Lou Reed passed away, his manager Tom Sarig said that Lou had asked him to find a record that I had recorded in 1963. The song, written by Doc Pomus, was 'Troubled Mind.' After Lou listened to the song, he told his manager, "Now I can die in peace." When I heard this story, it touched me. I was home, so I picked up my guitar and started singing "Troubled Mind." I hadn't sung it in years. All of a sudden, I started playing with the words, improvising, and "New York Is My Home" just came flowing out of me. I felt as if Lou and Doc had mysteriously sent it to me.

"You know, in the fifties, rock 'n' roll started as a rebellious music. We were rebelling against the establishment, against the status quo, and against the life that was being sold to us. By the time Lou Reed came along, there wasn't much to rebel against; it had all been said. So, Lou pushed it to the outer edges. He did everything to be offensive, but he was a gifted artist, so he did it in an intelligent and entertaining way. He was relevant. One time, at a dinner party, I told him and his wife, Laurie, that he reminded me of a Holy Fool. The Holy Fools are Russian monks who live in the

woods. If anyone tries to seek them out, get close to them, or talk to them, the monks start yelling and acting crazy to repel the visitor's admiration. I'm not sure if it's a matter of extreme humility or what. Lou simply smiled at my story.

"Lou Reed was always pushing people's buttons, not just for the reaction he may get or for sensationalism, but to see their value, significance, or reality. I believe he was frightened about having to conform to suburbia and its ideas of what life was about. Like the character in *Rebel Without a Cause*, he was pushing the limits out to the edge, but in a very thoughtful, intelligent way. He wasn't trying to be sensational, cheap, or shallow. He was truly seeking. He was a rebel with a cause. He knew that self-righteous people could be the most ugly, annoying people on the planet. Yeah, it was a holy dissatisfaction he possessed. I know he wanted to go deeper, learning and seeing the truth of what was out there. He wanted to embrace something of value, true, and eternal, something that he could believe and sink his teeth into. I also believe that, while Brian Wilson gave us a picture of what the West Coast was about, Lou Reed gave the country an idea of the East Coast. He painted a picture of New York—not the Frank Sinatra New York, New York, but a grittier underbelly of New York . . . the transvestites, the gay community, the drug addicts. I don't think any travel agency would hire Lou to do their travel portfolio for New York City.

"In a way, Lou Reed reminded me of Bo Diddley. He thought much about his guitar sound—it was everything to Lou. The dynamics of his music, the beauty of space that one or two guitars offered—the beauty ofrock 'n' roll is repetition and simplicity which is almost impossible to achieve. His backstreet poetry. Lou always had a less-is-more attitude. Lou was looking to write the perfect one-chord song. He was a powerful presence with that guitar, he had his own custom-built guitar, with special electronics, effects, and amps. What he developed was amazingly beautiful. I had a blast with Lou recording "Dirty Boulevard" at Mediasound Studios; we nailed it in one take! I loved the guy and, I'm proud to say, I know he loved me. I truly miss him.

Lou and Dion hanging out in Manhattan.

22.

Lou Reed's Induction Speech

It was 1958, and the cold winds of Long Island blew in from the ocean, their high-pitched howl mixing with the dusty, musky, mellifluous liquid sounds of rock 'n' roll—the sounds of another life, the sounds of freedom.

As Alan Freed pounded a telephone book and the honking sax of Big Al Sears seared the airwaves with his theme song "Hand Clappin'," I sat staring at an indecipherable book on plane geometry, whose planes and angles would forever escape me. And I wanted to escape it and the world of SAT tests, the college boards—leap immediately and eternally into the world of Shirley and Lee, The Diablos, The Paragons, The Jesters, Lilian Leach and the Mellows ("Smoke from Your Cigarette"), Alicia and the Rockaways ("Why Can't I Be Loved?"—a question that certainly occupied my teenage time). The lyrics sat in my head like Shakespearean sonnets, with all the power of tragedy: "Gloria," "Why Don't You Write Me?," "Darling, Send Me a Letter" by The Jacks.

Dion—the induction speech into The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

And then there was Dion—that great opening to "I Wonder Why" engraved in my skull forever. Dion, whose voice was unlike any other I had heard before. Dion could do all the turns, stretch those syllables so effortlessly, soar so high he could reach the sky and dance there among the stars forever. What a voice—that had absorbed and transmogrified all these influences into his own soul, as the wine turns into blood, a voice that stood on its own, remarkably and unmistakably from New York—Bronx Soul. It was the kind of voice you never forget. Over the years, that voice has stayed with me, as it has, I'm sure, stayed with you. And whenever I hear it, I'm flooded with memories of what once was and what could be.

It's been my pleasure to get to know Dion over the years and, even—my idea of heaven—sing occasional backup for him. He doesn't know how long I'd rehearsed those bass-line vocals. I was ready to back up Dion. He had the chops, and he practically invented the attitude. "Ruby Baby," "Donna the Prima Donna," "The Wanderer" . . . "I'll tear open my shirt and show her 'Rosie' on my chest," a line so good that twenty-odd years later I couldn't

resist doing a variant on it for one of my own albums.

After all, who could be hipper than Dion?

Dion's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame speech.

23.

Stevie Van Zandt's Induction Speech

If cats have nine lives, a cat named Dion stopped counting his lives a long time ago.

Could have retired a legend by 1960.

Only a few of the white doo-wop groups got real respect.

"I Wonder Why" is one of the top ten doo-wop classics of all time.

"Teenager In Love" and "Where Or When" followed and both top-five hits.

This earned them an opening spot on the Winter Dance Party Tour with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper.

You've probably heard the story by now, but briefly the bus had no heat, so Buddy decides to charter a plane on February 3, 1959.

There was only room for three on the plane so they had to flip a coin.

Dion won the coin toss, but the price was $36, which happened to be the monthly rent his parents were paying at the time, and he just couldn't see spending that kind of money, so he gave his seat to Ritchie Valens.

Destiny decided Dion had more work to do.

He'd end up with eight hits with the Belmonts and decides to try a solo career.

Right out of the box-

"Lonely Teenager," then "Runaround Sue."

And that's it.

Forget about it.

One hit after the other.

How hot was he?

His next hit was a B side!

A little something called “The Wanderer.

Then, “Lovers Who Wander,” “Little Diane,” “Love Came To Me,” “ Sandy,” etc.

That’s two careers and it’s only 1962.

He goes from Laurie Records over to Columbia, becoming the first rock artist signed to Columbia in spite of A&R boss Mitch Miller hating rock music with a passion, but the legendary John Hammond Jr., who served as an unofficial godlike presence at the time, having racially integrated Jazz along with signing Bessie Smith, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin, and about to sign Bruce Springsteen, I’m sure had something to do with it.

That’s John Hammond Jr., not to be confused with his son, John Hammond Jr., but Dion was hanging out with both of them and gets even deeper into his blues roots.

Dion was into primal blues music from artists like Robert Johnson early on, along with primal country music from Hank Williams.

Both of which must have seemed quite exciting and exotic to an Italian kid from the Bronx.

So now he goes to the Lieber and Stoller songbook with “Ruby Baby” and “Drip Drop.”

Throws in a little “Donna the Primadonna” and “This Little Girl” for good measure, nothing but hits.

Ends up one of the two rock artists on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper‘s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the other being Bob Dylan.

That’s three lives, and we’re still in the 60s.

He goes back to Laurie Records and for his birthday, or fourth REBIRTH day, they give him a little gift called “Abraham, Martin, And John.”

Sells a million.

In the 80s he gets into spiritual/religious type music and wins a couple of awards, including a Grammy.

Comes back to secular rock with “Yo Frankie” in 1989. A great record produced by Dave Edmunds.

Now, in the 2000s, Dion has once again returned to his blues and country roots with a string of great albums including *Bronx In*

Blue, Son Of Skip James.

Hooked up with Joey Bonamassa's label for *Blues with Friends* and *Stompin' Ground*.

The guests on these Blues records are unbelievable—Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Peter Frampton, Keb Mo, Rickie Lee Jones, Billy Gibbons, Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, but here's the real impressive part: who did the liner notes on *Blues With Friends?*

Bob Dylan!

Stompin' Ground's liner notes were done by Pete Townshend!

And all of these lives and careers and ups and downs are in a wonderful new play about his life, called *The Wanderer*, soon to open on Broadway.

And he's just getting started!

So it is with our distinct honor and pleasure the Bruce Springsteen Archives and Center For American Music proudly present Dion with his 2024 American Music Honors Award.

Bruce Springsteen, Mavis Staples, Darlene Love, Dion, John Mellencamp, and Jackson Browne.

Stevie Van Zandt, Mavis Staples, Bruce Springsteen, Dion, and Darlene Love.

Dion with the Disciples of Soul Girls

24.

The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame

The bell ringer's name was François, and he was the bell-ringer of Notre Dame. A very proud guy. He rang these magnificent bells that were crafted from the greatest bell-founders in the world. Crafted with the finest special metals, designed with perfect measurements and construction of molds, exceptional casting, and precise tuning—they were true works of art. François would ring these bells every day at Notre Dame. The sounds would fill the Paris streets with beauty.

François decided to go on a vacation, and he wanted to visit the United States of America. He wanted to experience New York City, and he was dying to visit the Bronx. He had heard so much about the neighborhood—the Bronx Zoo, the Botanical Gardens, Yankee Stadium, and Arthur Avenue, known for its fresh food and restaurants. François ended up on 187th Street, right in front of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.

Mount Carmel Church had two giant bells. They alert the neighborhood that it's time for Mass. Well, when François arrived, it just so happened to be twelve noon. The bell started ringing . . . so, François walked over to Mount Carmel and waited outside, wanting to meet whoever had the special honor of ringing the bells there.

Carmine, the bell-ringer of Mount Carmel, came out. François was so excited and introduced himself right away.

He said, "Hello, my name is François. I'm from Paris, France. I'm the bell-ringer at Notre Dame." Carmine said, "No kidding. I'm

Carmine, the bell-ringer here at Mount Carmel."

François couldn't help himself. He was excited. He said so, too, and a little crowd started gathering.

"You know, in Paris, we have the greatest bells this world has ever seen. They are so supreme and so sublime compared to ordinary bells. There's nothing like these magnificent bells on the face of the Earth. They were crafted in Germany, Italy, Russia, and Belgium. The greatest artists cast these bells, and Notre Dame embraced all of them. All! We have an array of sounds that is incomparable to anything you've heard. Sounds like heaven!"

Carmine looked at him and said, "Yeah, but you don't have Dion and the Belmonts."

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Chuch.

Dion and the Belmonts.

Dion and the Belmonts

25.

Principle Behind Authority and Responsibility

"HOW DOES IT FEEL / TO BE ON YOUR OWN / LIKE A ROLLING STONE?"

—BOB DYLAN

Dion and I sat at our special table at the Grille on Congress. While we were catching up, I noticed the voice of Bob Dylan break through on the sound system. Dion sat more erect. "Adam, did I tell you about the time my manager and I were sued by Freddie Milano, who sang with me and the Belmonts?"

I shook my head.

"I had done nothing wrong, so I wondered, *Why is this happening?* The lawsuit ended up going to trial, and, during everyone's testimony, I saw clearly—who I was, who my manager was, who Freddie Milano was, what my career was *all* about—the past, the present, and my future. For me, it was a defining moment in my life."

"How so, D?" I asked.

"Well, I saw, for the first time, how overreliant and dependent I was on my manager, and how irresponsible I had been, not paying attention to certain details and important decisions in my career.

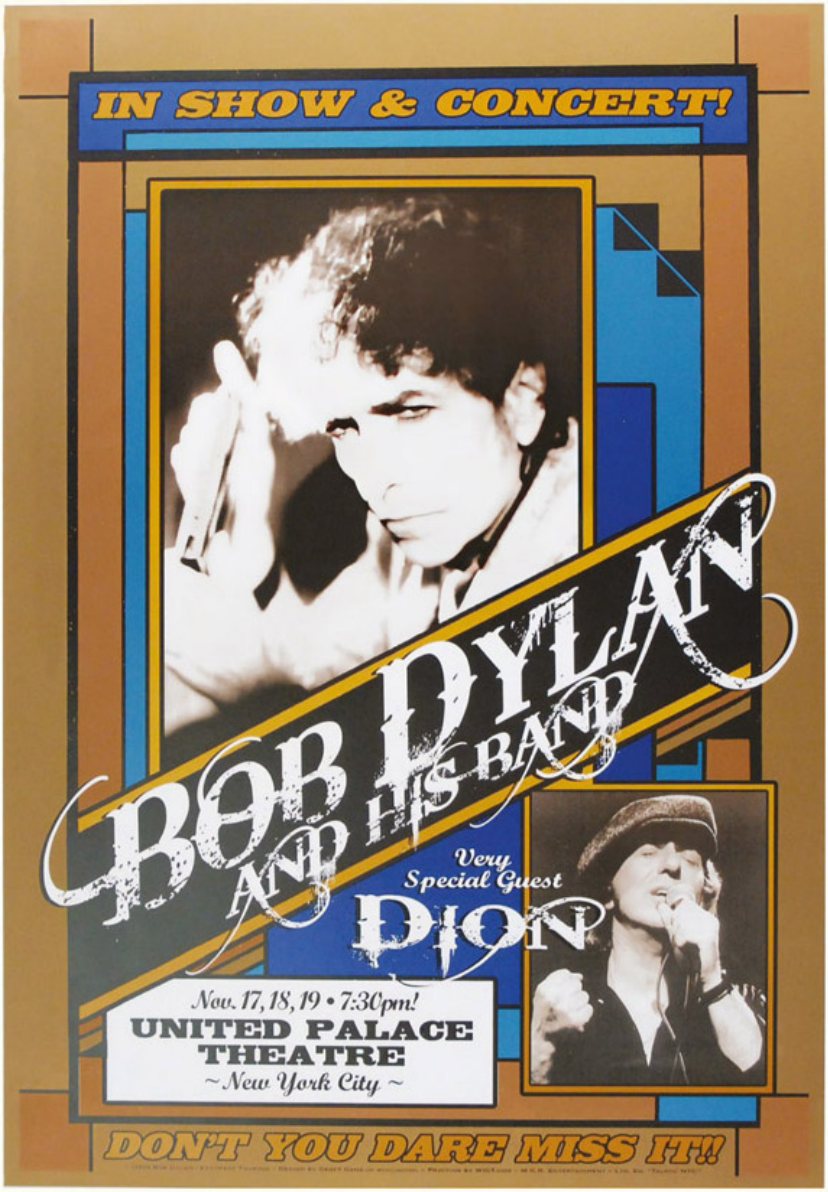
This was a *huge* turning point in my life. Actually, I lost, and it cost me a bit of money, but, in reality, it was one of the greatest wins of my life."

My eyes popped open.

"First, I fired my manager. Then, in shredding my hopes and dreams of how I thought everyone should be, I accepted everyone for *exactly* who they really were, and the way life truly was. This is how I learned about authority and responsibility, and here's what I learned: My manager had all the *authority*, and I had all the *responsibility*. The *big* takeaway was, *I'm not going to step another foot into the future without having the authority of which way my career was going*. Adam, here's the way it works: If you have all the responsibility, you should have all the authority. I want to be totally responsible for my decisions, not anybody else's.

"This was a giant shift in my life. That day, I decided that I wasn't going to be dependent or overly reliant on anyone ever again. I committed to being hands-on in my career. Susan took over all the publishing, and I started recording my homegrown, grassroots albums. Since then, I've recorded fourteen albums, and—as we are talking right now—*Stomping Ground* and *Blues with Friends* are number one and number three on the blues/rock charts. I wouldn't have this wonderful freedom if it weren't for that uncomfortable lawsuit."

Dion pointed up to the speakers playing Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." "On the way from the courthouse back to my apartment in Lower Manhattan, I turned on the radio, and on came this song. Now, when Bruce Springsteen inducted Bob into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, he said that when he first heard the snare shots at the beginning of that record, it was like somebody had kicked open the door of his mind. But for me, on that day—when Dylan said, *How does it feel to be on your own . . . like a rolling stone*—I looked up to the heavens, took a deep breath, and said . . . it feels f-ing good. It feels good to be free!"



Bob Dylan and Dion—November 17, 18, 19, 2009. A very special and magical show.

26.

Bridges and Walls

KING OF THE NEW YORK STREETS
I DIDN'T NEED NO BODYGUARD
I JUST RULED FROM MY BACKYARD

Sandee's Diner. Maybe the last of its kind. The classic diner is an endangered species. Hanging on the walls were vintage signs from the late fifties. *MILK. EGGS. BUTTER. HOMETOWN GIRL. $2 FRIES. LOOKOUT MOONPIE. EAT HERE—it's cheap and homemade*. This place reminded me of my childhood in New Jersey—the Ground Round, Friendly's, and the Tenafly Diner. The old-style long counters, chrome stools, small booths, leather bucket seats, wall-mounted jukeboxes at each table (25 cents gets you two songs), old-school soda fountains. I felt like a kid.

"Yo, I love diners, Adam. Reminds me of home. The neighborhood."

The Bronx.

Dion and I looked over the menu.

"What can I getcha, hon?" our server asked. She casually rested her left hand on the table, while her right hand grabbed for a pen from inside her clean, white, collared shirt.

Dion ordered first. "The eggs, over easy, and some grits please, and an iced tea." I had the plain omelet with four strips of bacon.

We quickly caught up on life. My kids. Dion's beautiful wife, Susan. The new album. My life-coaching and recent television gigs. Dion's recent podcasts and interviews.

I was going through a growth spurt in my life, specifically in my relationships. I had one friend who had really hurt my feelings by sharing some confidential conversations.

Dion grabbed the old-fashioned red squeezable ketchup bottle with his left hand and the small glass pepper shaker with his right. "Adam, there's a time to build bridges," he said as he raised the ketchup bottle, "and a time to build walls." He lifted the pepper shaker.

"What do you mean?"

"Early in my years in recovery, I thought I could take anything thrown my way. Yo, you punch me, I'll turn the other cheek. You need to scream at me? No problem, I have broad shoulders, I could take it." He shook his head and giggled. "But, I was wrong. My father-in-law Jack taught me: We aren't supposed to just take it on the chin. Look, life is about giving, right?! There's a time to build bridges. It's a beautiful thing to be present, patient, compassionate, and understanding. To hear what the other person has to say. To understand their point of view." Dion then looked me dead in the eyes with a face as serious as a heart attack.

"Other times, we have to build walls. We have to say, 'No. I'm no longer going to get my head bashed in. I'm no longer gonna take it.' We didn't get clean and sober to be doormats. Look at Jesus—he spoke up for himself. In John 18, Jesus was questioned by the High Priest."

I was always impressed by how well Dion knew scripture. Being with my mentor was my own personal Bible study. He could tell you exactly where specific stories and teachings were in the books of the Old and New Testaments.

"Jesus put it all on the table and told them he always taught openly to the world in the open fields, the synagogues, and temple. When he said this, one of the officers nearby slapped him in the face! Jesus didn't build a bridge, Adam. It could've been an opportunity to build a bridge if the officer was honest. Jesus spoke up for himself. 'If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I have told the truth, why did you hit me?' "

Dion combed his salt-and-pepper goatee with his hand.

"Adam, love is willing the good of the other. But there is a time

to distance yourself in a relationship and detach with love. When someone's trying to manipulate you or make demands, you can be sure you're not being loved. It's one thing to be open to criticism, but it's another to be abused. If you don't build a wall, it can be toxic! I think there's a reason they call it toxic—it's poison to the mind, body, and soul."

Our waitress brought over our food and drinks as Dion and I got deeper into conversation. I lived for these moments.

"I had this experience with a friend who betrayed me back in 1992. He made my life very complicated at the time. There was also another friend—more recent—that got very demanding and abusive. I had no idea why, but that was not my problem. I had to say 'no' and walk away from that relationship. I did him a favor by walking away. By distancing myself, I'm making a statement in enabling him to look at what he's doing wrong. It's not up to me to keep explaining to him.

"Once you establish a boundary and you distance yourself with love from the other person, they can come at you in three ways."

Dion extended his pointer finger. "The first way is accusing you. They might approach you through an e-mail, a text, or a phone call and start off by accusing you. What's wrong with you? What the fuck is your problem?" Dion looked me in the eyes. "You can simply reply: Thanks for sharing. I believe I'm going to distance myself from this relationship for a time for my own well-being, my own peace of mind."

Dion took a sip of his iced tea. "The second way they can come at you is by what I call 'fishing.' *Hey, are you mad at me? If I did something wrong, please tell me what it is. I don't have the slightest idea."* Dion squinted his eyes, shaking his head. "If you answer this question, you're in the game on their terms, and they've got you going. So, the same answer applies here: Thanks for sharing. I'm going to distance myself from this relationship for a time for my own emotional well-being.

"The third is the honest way. They will come to you asking for forgiveness and making amends. *Please forgive me. I betrayed your trust. I told somebody information you trusted me with. I was wrong*. Now, to an honest approach like this, you can reply, 'Hey, join the club. I've done stupid stuff like that myself.' "

Dion smiled and continued. "I'm not saying you have to be the best of friends any longer, but you can start a new and different

kind of relationship with an honest approach like this. Now, it's time to build a bridge."

Dion paused a few moments, reflecting. "But with caution."

I listened to my mentor. I envisioned which relationships I could build a bridge to and help amend situations and which of my relationships I had to finally build a wall against. This is where the Serenity Prayer Dion taught me was invaluable:

GOD, GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE, THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN, AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

AMEN.

27.

Love vs. Approval

"AND IF YOU SHOULD SAY GOOD-BYE
I'LL STILL GO ON LOVING YOU."

"Humility is a healer of pain, Adam."

As usual, Dion's words spoke right to my heart. We were sitting in Pizza-Time, one of our favorite spots to hit after our recovery meetings. Pizza-Time is not just some hangout pizza parlor. No, sir. This little golden nugget serves some of the finest and most authentic New York Italian food on the planet. The smell of Parmesan cheese would have driven Waylon Jennings and Buddy Holly back to Texas.

When you walk in, you feel as if a time machine has transported you back to the late fifties and sixties, to the Bronx, outside on the corner. Street signs from Arthur Avenue, Fordham Road, Tremont Avenue, and East 187th Street are hanging on the restaurant walls. Old brick-patterned wallpaper made the place look like the brownstones in the famous borough. There were about twelve tables in the middle surrounded by red booths on the walls. Each booth had pictures of famous people from New York, like Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, Bob Dylan, and my favorite guy. . . .

"D, say that again." His statement had hit me hard.

He took a sip from his Diet Coke. "Humility is the healer of pain. You can see yourself accurately. I don't believe that we are punished for our sins. No . . ." Dion shook his head. "I believe we

are punished *by* our sins. By making the wrong decision, a sinful decision . . . and feeling the guilt and shame from it. In the fourth step of twelve-step recovery, we make a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves. We can even go to church, confess, and be absolved of our sins. We can be cleansed . . . and being clean is better than being clever and getting away with it. Because you never get away with it. God loves us unconditionally; he doesn't punish us! He loves us. We are punished *by* the act, not *for* it."

I was going through a difficult time in my life. I was recently separated from my wife and feeling overwhelmed and down. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believed the marriage ending was a sin. I leaned into the relationship as hard as I could. We went to marriage counseling for years. We went on vacations to try to rekindle the flame. We tried and tried, but, in the end, we were two different people on two different journeys. I always wanted my family to stay together, and, at this time, I was in a lot of pain.

Dion once taught me *a good share disturbs the comfortable—and comforts the disturbed*. Well, this was comforting for me, so I had obviously been disturbed!

It was good news. I was not going to be punished by God (for my sins, mistakes, divorce). The pain was punishment enough.

Just then our waitress brought out two mozzarella, tomato, and prosciutto. We always ordered this beauty, or snapper—puttanesca style.

"Thank you! That looks delicious," I said.

"Thank you so much. Mine looks way better than his," Dion joked.

We both dug in and chomped away. The Four Seasons' "Big Girls Don't Cry" was playing in the background, and I took in the ambience.

"Adam, if you surrender, you're free. If you truly surrender to God . . . you're a free agent. I was resistant to that. I learned in the Bronx you don't surrender . . . to anything . . . ever! We didn't care if people were banging our heads on the concrete—you don't surrender!"

We both took a bite of our food. "Just make the best decisions in the way you know how. Check in with your heart, your mind, your God . . . and decide. Let me tell you why . . . If you make decisions based on people's approval, you'll wear yourself out. There's not enough gas for that journey—trust me, I tried."

Dion started laughing.

"I was always going to show my mother that I was responsible—not like my father. Now, my dad had wonderful, childlike qualities. I've mentioned that to you. He was like Tarzan. He could do handstands, and he'd show me how beautiful the clouds in the sky were, and he loved the arts . . . like me. I loved my father . . . but he didn't like to work. My mom, on the other hand, was an extremely hard worker. She worked two jobs. My folks always fought over the rent and money."

Dion looked at the pictures of himself on the wall. I was always so proud to see them, but he had such a healthy detachment from his fame. He pointed to a picture of him from the late fifties. "I was a very optimistic young lad, very hardworking, with a strong will. I knew I had a talent at a very young age. I had a vision. Honor was very important to me. What people thought of me was primary! And, I did make it; I lucked out; I did arrive. In 1958, I got a hit record that propelled me to the top of my profession."

I lightly cut into a soft piece of mozzarella cheese, covered with prosciutto and tomato, and dabbed with some homemade Italian vinaigrette. To anybody else, this looks like two guys having a fun lunch in an Italian restaurant. Don't judge a book by its cover—something holy and transcendent happens during these talks. It's not just a passing down of wisdom and knowledge—it's more than that. It's a father and son speaking the real language of the heart.

"Adam, if you don't get those underlying issues straightened out, they'll kill you. Love and approval are two totally separate things! People's approval is not love."

Approval is not love. Approval is not love. This was a complete paradox for me. "Dion, what do you mean?"

"Okay, I love my three daughters with all of my heart. It's unconditional. I will always love them . . . but, I may not always approve of all their decisions. And that's okay. I will not agree with everything they do; people are different, and that's what makes life interesting. I taught them at an early age: *Don't ever live for my approval*. Don't feel you have to live up to my expectations. You're not obligated to me. When facing a decision—check in with your heart, your mind, your conscience, your God . . . and make the best decision possible! I'm good with that. I told them, 'I'm proud of you girls. You have good minds! But that doesn't mean I need to approve of all your choices."

That made perfect sense. I love my two kids with every fiber of my being. But, as they grow up and mature, I will not always approve of all their decisions and actions. Lord knows, I don't approve of all of my own! But I will always love them. Always.

"Adam, get this. If you confuse *approval* with *love*, you will be seeking approval all of your life . . . and it is *not* love."

My conversations with Dion always made me believe more deeply, hold my face up to the Light, even though, in the moment, I could not see. Humility truly is a healer of pain.

Dion's girls! North Miami, 1975.

My girls, North Miami.

Tane, Dion, August, and Lark.

28.

How I Learned

By Dion

Hank Williams: I learned how to communicate.

Jimmy Reed: I learned how to groove.

Duke Ellington: I learned how to be intelligent.

Fats Domino: I learned how to lay back and relax.

Chuck Berry: I learned how to rock, and how to say “no.”

Little Richard: I learned what free-abandon means.

Bo Diddley: I learned that the beauty of Rock ’n’ Roll is repetition.

Jerry Lee Lewis: I learned how to give myself permission to make mistakes.

Buddy Lucas: I learned that love is willing the good of the other.

Nino Tempo: I learned how to overcome my fear of people.

Gene Pitney: I learned how to ask myself why I was angry and how

to see myself accurately.

Bobby Darin: I learned about the music business and how to pay taxes.

Bob Dylan: I learned that thinking wasn't rearranging my prejudices.

Big Joe Turner: I learned how to sing and stay in the pocket.

Bruce Springsteen: I learned how to be vulnerable and how to let people see who I truly am.

Clive Davis: I learned commitment.

Dr. Jordan Peterson: I learned how important it is to take responsibility.

Dennis Prager: I learned common sense.

Bob Bennett: I learned how to be a grown-up.

Buddy Holly: I learned how to be bold.

Carl Perkins: I learned that I didn't have to please everybody.

John Hammond: I learned that the blues was in my DNA.

John Lennon: I learned how to build bridges and when to build walls.

Lightning Hopkins: I learned how to be honest.

Paul Simon: I learned my gratitude should be expressed through service and true charity.

Jeff Beck: I learned how to feel deeply.

Peter Frampton: I learned how to have courage.

Boz Scaggs: I learned how to stay young and have fun.

Patti Scialfa: I learned beauty, truth, and goodness.

Eric Clapton: I learned how life is about giving.

Sonny Landreth: I learned how to be generous.

Joe Bonamassa: I learned how to be fearless.

Brian Setzer: I learned how to take chances.

Mark Knopfler: I learned how to care and do the work.

Sam Cooke: I learned how to place dependence on God first—not on another human being.

Roy Orbison: I learned how to write a good song.

Van Morrison: I learned how to let go and let God.

Robert Johnson: I learned how to be authentic.

B. B. King: I learned how to put my differences on display.

Darlene Love: I learned how to have faith.

Jimmy Vivino: I learned how to stay in my own lane.

Quincy Jones: I learned how to speak my mind.

Mike Aquilina: I learned how to be considerate.

Gene Vincent: I learned how to detach from the attachment to approval.

Eddie Cochran: I learned how to put a little sense of humor into a song.

Pete Townshend: I learned how to dream big.

Leonard Cohen: I learned forgiveness.

Bill W.: I learned how to take self-inventory and get rid of my defects of character.

Dr. Bob: I learned how to keep it simple.

Ritchie Valens: I learned how to sing from the center of my being.

The Big Bopper: I learned to be fun-loving.

Stevie Van Zandt: I learned how to be a good friend.

Shemekia Copeland: I learned how to be patient.

Samantha Fish: I learned what passion means.

Johnny Cash: I learned that a little style goes a long way.

Bishop Robert Barron: I learned how to have a healthy detachment from wealth, pleasure, power, and honor.

Lou Reed: I learned about the beauty of space and that less is more.

John Chiesa: I learned to be grateful.

Dr. Scott Hahn: I learned how to live in a higher reality.

Dr. Phil: I learned how to be a life-giving lover.

Joe Menza: I learned how to be carefree.

Jill Menza: I learned to persevere.

Joe Louis Walker: I learned how to keep it simple.

Rick Martens: I learned how to be humble.

Adam Jablin: I learned how to be a Hero.

Jimi Hendrix: I learned simply how to be myself.

Charles Messina: I learned how to trust my artistic instincts.

Frankie Lymon: I learned willingness.

Louis Prima: I learned to be a rhythm singer.

Steve Bottari: I learned how to listen.

Wayne Hood: I learned how to compromise.

Little Anthony: I learned compassion.

Bob Gaudio: I learned empathy.

Amy Grant: I learn to be open to God's grace.

Monsignor Joseph Perricone: I learned that the virtuous man is a happy man.

Brenda Lee: I learned to be open.

Frankie Valli: I learned to be diligent.

Etta James: I learned how to sing with heart.

Father Brian: I learned how to persevere.

Keb Mo: I learned how to be genuine.

Lloyd Clareman: I learned how to pay attention.

My daughters Tane, Lark, and August: I learned how to be vulnerable and strong.

And My Personal Favorite . . .
Susan DiMucci: I learned how to love and be thoughtful.

Dion and Jamie King Colton

29.

My Top Lists

Top 10 most influential albums

1. *Hank Williams' Greatest Hits*
2. *Jimmy Reed at Carnegie Hall*
3. *Louis Prima's Greatest Hits*
4. *King of the Delta Blues Singers: Robert Johnson*
5. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*
6. *Chuck Berry's Greatest Hits*
7. *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band: East-West*
8. *The Best of B. B. King*
9. *Best of Al Green*
10. *Van Morrison: Moondance*

Top Books

1. *Seven-Story Mountain* / Thomas Merton
2. *Catholicism* / Robert Barron
3. *Mere Christianity* / C.S. Lewis
4. *The Fulfillment of All Desire* / Ralph Martin
5. *David and Goliath* / Malcolm Gladwell
6. *The Fathers of the Church* / Mike Aquilina
7. *The Case for Jesus* / Grant Pitre
8. *Men and Marriage* / George Gilder

Top 10 Movies

1. *Shawshank Redemption*
2. *Gran Turino*
3. *The Family Man*
4. *Fargo*
5. *Brother Son, Sister Moon*
6. *It's a Wonderful Life*
7. *The Godfather*
8. *12 Angry Men*
9. *Raging Bull*
10. *The Robe*

Top 12 Doo-Wop Songs

1. “Could This Be Magic?”/The Dubs
2. “Maybe”/The Chantels
3. “In the Still of the Night” / The Five Satins
4. “There’s a Moon Out Tonight” / The Capris
5. “Be My Baby” / The Ronettes
6. “Oh, What a Night!” / The Dells
7. “Please Say You Want Me” /The Schoolboys
8. “Church Bells May Ring” / The Willows
9. “Only You” / The Platters
10. “Can’t We Be Sweethearts?” / The Cleftones
11. “This Little Girl of Mine” / The Cleftones
12. “Come Go with Me” / Del-Vikings

Top 5 Blues Songs

1. “Don’t Make Your Move Too Soon” / B. B. King
2. “Bad Trouble” / Canned Heat
3. “Crossroads” / Robert Johnson
4. “Born under a Bad Sign” / Albert King
5. “Katie Mae” / Lightning Hopkins

Top 5 Favorite Artists

1. Picasso
2. Monet
3. Renoir
4. Cézanne
5. Van Gogh

Top 10 Favorite Female Vocal Artists

1. Bonnie Raitt
2. Susan Tedeschi
3. Aretha Franklin
4. Carole King
5. Annie Lennox
6. Chrissie Hynde
7. Christine McVie
8. Rachel Price
9. Ronnie Spector
10. Danielle Nicole

30.

Keeping Your Eye on the Ball

"YOU HAVE MADE US FOR YOURSELF, O LORD, AND OUR HEART IS RESTLESS UNTIL IT RESTS IN YOU."

—SAINT AUGUSTINE

Dion and I were back at Pizza-Time, seated at the Arthur Avenue table. On this day, D was swarmed by adoring fans. After all these years, I still love watching how everybody reacts to him. Of course, they love his music and admire his fame, but every fan sincerely believes Dion is part of their family. His songs and melodies have created memories that completely shifted their lives and changed their state of mind.

"Yo, Adam—it's good to be an ambassador of goodwill. To give from the heart, to edify and encourage people. I believe that's the point of the whole book: *Life is about giving*. It's all about being of maximum service to God and others. That's what I call keeping your eye on the ball."

We both ordered the chicken cacciatore (chicken cutlets with onions, fresh marinara, mushrooms, and spices) and iced teas.

"One of Saint. Augustine's most famous passages from his *Confessions* is 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.' This is my mantra!"

"I'm a Rock 'n' Roller. I have a lot of obsessions—alcohol, drugs, lust, food, achieving, and so on. My obsessions of the mind (my

addictions) are much stronger than my willpower, and they will win every time. That is why I need a power greater than myself to fight the battle with me. I can't even stop myself from overeating a bag of cashews. If I need help with changing a habit so small, what makes me think I can stop myself from shooting heroin? And I know this because I've been clean and sober for fifty-five years. So, I can testify that all things are possible through Him.

"I kept my eye on the ball through the pandemic (COVID-19). It was the most creative period of my life. I believe God made all of us with a desire for creativity. When we actualize this, it brings us a sense of pure joy. We can experience that joy from the creative act itself. This is not something I deserved or have earned, but, in some miraculous way, I found myself ready to receive. When I was younger, I was always striving for accolades and admiration. Those were my goals. But when I reached them, they didn't satisfy. I finally discovered true joy when I learned to stop caring about all that—when I learned to relax and make music with friends . . . music that would make even more friends for us through its joy. To make music with friends, and to make friends through music—I can't imagine a better life than this. I kept my eye on the ball, Adam, and I made two *Billboard* number-one albums.

"That's what the play *The Wanderer* is about. The show has all the wonder, the awe, the beauty, the music, the romance between Susan and me, being transformed, redeemed, and victorious! In my world, that's keeping your eye on the ball. And that's what I do: I turn it over to my Creator, and He never ceases to amaze me."

The opening of *The Wanderer* at Paper Mill Playhouse was a hit in 2022. Next stop—Broadway!

Christy Altomare and Mike Wartella in rehearsal of *The Wanderer*.

Mike Wartella starring in *The Wanderer,* playing a young version of me.

Dion, Jill Menza (producer of *The Wanderer*), and Stevie Van Zandt (musical advisor)

Performance of *The Wanderer,* Paper Mill Playhouse, Milburn,

New Jersey.

Michael Stotts and our union brothers and sisters doing the work behind the scenes of *The Wanderer*.

Dion and the women cast members of *The Wandere:* Natalie Gallo, Gabrielle Djenné, Mackenzie Bell, Christy Altomare, Joli Tribuzio, Joy Woods, Robin Masella, and Sarah Daniels Barrett.

31.

Blocking the Sunlight of the Spirit

"LOVE WITHOUT TRUTH IS SHALLOW.
TRUTH WITHOUT LOVE IS STERILE."

"Adam, did I ever tell you about an old friend of mine, Jane Moran?" Dion and I were at Pho Boca. The restaurant's mission is to bring healthy Vietnamese pho noodle soup and elegant Asian cuisine to South Florida. Our friend Craig Gordon told us that this pho soup was a religious experience, so we couldn't resist.

I shook my head. "No, D, never." I dug into my spicy stir-fried lemongrass chicken with bell peppers, onions, and mushrooms.

Dion combed his stylish salt-and-pepper mustache and goatee as he sighed, deep in thought. "Jane is a classic example that feelings are not facts. I met her back in 1995 at a charity concert I was playing with some great musician friends. After the show, a bunch of us went out to a diner in New York to grab a bite to eat. Jane lived near Susan and me, so I walked her home. That night I found out so many remarkable facts about this amazing woman. Jane was not just a successful attorney, but she also edited medical journals. We shared some great stories, and, as we said good-night, I said,

‘Jane, you’re really one smart cookie. You have a good mind. You’re very bright.’ ”

Wham!

Dion hit the table and startled me. He opened his eyes really wide, impersonating Jane.

“Don’t you ever tell me that I’m intelligent, Dion! Don’t you ever tell me I’m smart. I hate it when people tell me that.”

Dion said he asked her why she felt that way. She told him: “When I was seven years old, my grandmother told me that I was hideous-looking and that I’d better develop my brains, because no one would ever want me for my looks. I hate when people tell me I’m intelligent!”

He said he just rolled with it. “It was obvious Jane was not an ugly woman, but I just let it be. After that, I didn’t see her for a long time. But, fifteen years later, in 2010, I was on 63rd Street, right by Lincoln Center, with my friend Anton. We walked into Damrosch Park and bumped into Jane. I thought—*Perfect: Anton and Jane were both the same age and single*. I wanted to make a proper introduction. As I introduced them, I totally forgot about the incident fifteen years prior. Now, Jane’s beauty is evident, so I told Anton how amazingly bright and sharp Jane is, and . . .”

Wham!

Dion made a similar face, mimicking Jane.

‘“Didn’t I tell you to *never* call me smart? It pisses me off!”

“Wow. I truly had forgotten what had happened in 1995, but this last event with Jane stayed with me. Some time went by again. I started to grow in my faith and in my mind. I revised some old pet theories and lies I had of my own. I reversed some decisions I made when I was a kid growing up in the Bronx, and as a young man with fame, money, and prestige. You can’t build your life on a lie, and some of these lies are embedded way down in our belief system —below the level of consciousness. One day, I was in the kitchen with Susan talking about some of the old ideas I had let go of from the past. It hit me that Jane Moran was the poster child for a person who has never replaced the false ideas she was holding on to. I told Susan, ‘Watch this,’ as I picked up the phone and gave my old friend a call. I was hoping she had let go of this untruth and moved on.”

Dion put his thumb to his ear and pinky to his mouth, bringing me visually into the scene in his kitchen that day.

‘Jane. Yo, it’s Dion. How are you? I’m here with Susan; you’re on speaker.’

“ ‘Hi, Susan,’ said Jane.

“Jane, Sue and I were talking about knowing the difference between a fact and a feeling. I told her the story of your grandmother and how, when you were seven years old, she said you were ugly—’

“ ‘Not *ugly*. She said I was *hideous-looking!*’ ”

“ ‘Jane, did you ever really look at that? It’s not true. Did you ever think of getting some kind of therapy and getting rid of that obvious lie?”

“ ‘No! And it’s all her fault. That crazy bitch! It’s her fault I was never married, and I’m all alone.’ ”

“Adam, this ugly lie had become part of Jane’s identity. She had built her entire life around what her grandma had said. I tried speaking to her several times, but I couldn’t get through. I was wondering why someone wouldn’t want to get rid of a faulty belief like that. Why do people live with the same bad song on repeat—like a broken record? One day, I asked my dear friend Carol Razza, a psychologist, ‘If you had to say one common trait of everyone that comes to see you for therapy—looking for an answer for what is wrong with them—what would it be? Self-esteem? Addictions? Connection? My own guess was ‘connection.’

“No. She said everyone who sits in that seat is trying to build their life on a lie. Somewhere deep down in their belief system, they believe in a lie, and that lie is blocking them from the sunlight of the spirit.”

This talk between Dion and me gave me the ability to create meanings from my past that serve me rather than disempower me. I know I can cling to the idea that, in God’s hands, my dark past is my greatest possession, and is the key to life to shine on others.

One of our fellowship brothers and leaders in recovery! Steve Kennedy, Dion, and Adam—PIZZA-TIME.

Dion, South Street Seaport.

32.

The Four Horsemen of Atheism

"WHO DO YOU THINK TAUGHT BIRDS TO FLY?
WHO PAINTED RAINBOWS ON THE SKY?
WHO DO YOU THINK MADE YOU AND I?
HE DID!
WHY IS THIS SOMETHING RATHER THAN NOTHING?

"Adam, I was in the gym the other day, and a bunch of guys who knew about my faith and belief in God walked up to challenge me. Now, they love reading and studying Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Dan Dennett—whom I call the four horsemen of atheism. One guy named Robbie—a lovely, bright, young guy, asked somewhat sarcastically, 'You believe in Heaven, don't you?' "

I took a sip of my drink. "What did you say?"

Dion's posture grew upright and strong. "I said, 'I don't just *believe* in Heaven, I *know* there is a Heaven."

I smiled.

"So . . . Robbie responded, 'Do you know anybody who died, came back, and told you there is a Heaven?' Adam, to be honest, I didn't really want to get into it. I needed to finish my workout. I had a meeting with the record company shortly after I trained in the gym. I simply answered, 'No, I don't know anyone who died,

came back, and told me there is a Heaven.' Robbie, a little cocky, boasted, 'Ha! I prove my point. There you go . . .' and began walking away.

I couldn't wait for what came next. Don't poke a guy from the Bronx!

"I called him back. 'Yo, Robbie . . . wait a minute. Don't you think that turnabout is fair play here? Where do you go when you die?' "

I raised my eyebrows, curious about what Robbie answered.

Dion continued, "Robbie said, 'In the ground. I go nowhere. I'll go back into the earth.' So, I asked, 'Do you know anybody who died, came back, and said to you there is nothing?' Robbie said 'No.' " Dion slapped the table. " 'Ha! You have as much faith as I have, except I believe yours is misplaced.' "

I laughed.

"Robbie got frustrated. He went down to his locker to Google some more questions and also got some books by Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. Later, he texted me some YouTube TED Talks videos from Sam Harris and Dan Dennett. Adam, I was open. I read the books and watched the videos. Right from the beginning I realized that these guys are very prolific and imaginative thinkers, writers, and speakers. Very bright men, whom I believe mean well. Christopher Hitchens—may he rest in peace—refers to God as the 'flying spaghetti monster in the sky.' Adam, I kid you not, the first thing I realized was the God that they were all rejecting—I reject also! They think true, intelligent believers embrace a supreme being within the universe . . . or, a supreme being within nature. As if you could go up in a spaceship, find God, take a scraping of Him, and place it on a Petri dish and say, 'Yeah, this is Him.' "

Dion shook his head from left to right. "I don't think so! God doesn't live within space and time. He's not subject to space and time. He *created* space and time. He's outside of space and time. God is not contingent on anything. He is the sheer act of being itself! Moses asked God, 'Who are you?' God answered, 'I am that I am.' He is the beginning and the end. The Alpha and the Omega. All things are possible with God. Believing in this all-powerful God, who spoke the universe into existence, is super-rational, logical, reasonable, and mega-sane.

"There are many young people today who say science is the

answer to all our questions, and they reject all other forms of knowledge. They believe that all knowledge should be reduced to the scientific method. The skeptics say, 'If you can see it, if you can measure it and do experiments on it, that's understandable, and it's the only thing that would matter and be true. Everything else is your own private opinion or your own little pet theory.' We love science; science is remarkable, but we can't reduce all forms of knowledge and knowing to the scientific method. Technology is amazing! Our iPhones and our computers are wonderful, but science can't tell you how to use them. Science itself would refute the notion to reduce all forms of knowledge and knowing to the scientific method.

"There are ways of knowing that have nothing to do with science. What makes something beautiful? What does it mean to be human? What's the right moral choice? What's the purpose of your life? How do you explain love for your wife and children? There are certainly other ways of knowing."

Dion slowly raised his arm and pointer finger. "Now, I believe these New Atheists think that true, intelligent believers have no brains and are childlike, as if they believe in superstition and fairy tales. But nothing could be further from the truth. Everything these four horsemen bring up has been dealt with and answered by brilliant men and thinkers like Saint Thomas Aquinas, G. K. Chesterton, and C. S. Lewis. Nothing new here. I heard it all before when my father came back from England with stories about Bertrand Russell. It's a boring playbook to me."

I took it all in. The moment. The words. The meaning. Dion knew how to turn the lights on in my heart, my soul, and my mind.

"Adam, when you're not plugged into the center and this beautiful, loving God, you have to figure everything out yourself. All the pressure is on you . . . good luck with that."

When I was getting sober, Dion made sure that my relationship with God was right—first. Dion guided me toward a deep and effective spiritual awakening that revolutionized my entire life, toward my kids, my family, my peers, and my Creator. The central fact of my life today is the absolute certainty that God has entered my heart in a way that is miraculous. He has launched me to a Higher Reality and helped me accomplish things I could never do by myself. The pressure was off my back, as my mentor says . . . I was taken care of.

Where it all started—Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Bronx.

From “The Wanderer” to “The Thunderer.”

33.

From "The Wanderer" to "The Thunderer"

"Love without truth is just sentimentality.
Truth without love is sterile.
St. Jerome swelled men's minds with Godly leaven—
it takes all kinds to make it to heaven."

What I'm about to share with you is a story of how I met my songwriting partner Mike Aquilina, got deeper into my faith, wrote one of my favorite songs, and realized it takes all kinds to make it to Heaven. Susan and I had taken a special trip to Rome in 2005 with our dear friend Dr. Scott Hahn, a popular speaker, teacher, and the author of *30 People from Different Parishes*. On this day, we went to the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. This is where the Holy Apostle Paul is buried. It's this beautiful, magnificent nineteenth-century church with triumphant arches and stained-glass windows. It's very, very touching.

There's a magnificent statue of Saint Paul in the front garden. On this beautiful lawn, near the back entrance, there's a statue of Saint Jerome. Now, at this time, I was standing next to a guy I really didn't know very well—his name is Mike Aquilina, and he's written more than fifty books. He would soon become my songwriting partner, a brother, and a dear friend, and we would go on to make musical history.

Standing next to this colossal statue, right at the center of the atrium, I said to Mike, "Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." Saint Jerome. I had a flashback from Mount Carmel Church in the Bronx, where they had a plaque on the wall that contained his famous quote.

"Ohhhh, *The Thunderer*!" Mike said back to me.

"The Thunderer'?" I questioned him. "What are you talking about?"

Mike answered politely, "That's what they called St. Jerome —'The Thunderer.'"

I looked at him awkwardly and asked "Why, The Thunderer?"

Right there, Mike taught me all about Saint Jerome. That Jerome was originally from what we now would call Croatia. He was an ornery character and extremely bright. A true academic. However, in his younger years, he was also a ladies' man; he liked to roam around and around. He was like "The Wanderer," and it was his escapades and running around that complicated his life and made him suffer with guilt. This grief made a young Saint Jerome desire a life of simplicity and purity, so he embraced Christianity. He was a very extreme guy, so he went all-in with practicing asceticism—a lifestyle characterized by abstinence of sensual pleasures. At this time in history, the elders would take the brightest young men from all over the world as they knew it at that time and send them to Rome to be mentored, study, and learn.

Also, at this time, in the fourth century, Pope Damasus saw how smart Jerome was and asked him to translate the Bible from Greek to Latin. He did this . . . single-handedly! This version of the Holy Bible is called the Vulgate; it is the first translation. He gave *ignorance of scripture* new meaning—he knew every word. He finished this work in 404.

Now, Saint Jerome was an uppity kind of guy. He was very bright but also very cranky, intolerant, and overbearing. He didn't like the way people dressed or how they spoke. He didn't like Greeks; he didn't like Romans; he cursed at people who got on his nerves. So, I asked Mike Aquilina, "How did he ever become a saint? You can't go around cursing at people and become a saint! I thought you had to be humble."

Mike said, "It takes all kinds to make it to Heaven."

I knew right then and there . . . this guy deserves a song!

Saint Jerome—The Thunderer! In my research for lyrics, I found

out more about this radical but amazing saint. He didn't like being and living in Rome, so he moved to Bethlehem, Israel, and lived in a cave for years, making friends with a rabbi, learning and perfecting his Hebrew, and even translating the Old Testament from Hebrew to Latin! Is this guy amazing or what? This guy is a trip. He translates the Bible twice from two different languages; some people can't even read the Bible once—in their own language.

The first song Mike Aquilina and I ever wrote together was "The Thunderer." This man teaches us that we can't really jump on anybody's journey and approach to the way they share the love of God, because we are all so different. From Mother Teresa in the streets of Calcutta, putting the faces of lepers in her hands, to being cursed out from the Thunderer. It takes all kinds to make it into Heaven.

We wrote and released this blues song. This jockey from Woodstock, New York, played it and shared the song with a friend of his, who then shared it with a priest friend from the Bronx at Saint Jerome Church. This priest then brought it over to Saint Jerome's school, and they adopted "The Thunderer" as their mascot, and their sports teams are called "The Thunderers." Life is amazing—what a trip!

Dr. Scott Hahn and Dion at St. Peter's Church in Rome, Italy, 2000.

Dion and Mike Aquilina, returning from Rome, 2006.

34.

Broad Shoulders

"I LOVE MY FATHER AND MOTHER, LOVE MY SISTERS AND BROTHER.
WHEN IT ALL COMES AROUND, YOU ARE THE CENTER OF MY LIFE.
I LOVE THE POET AND PREACHERS, LOVE THE CHILD AND THE TEACHERS.
WHEN THE SEASONS HAVE TURNED, YOU ARE THE CENTER OF MY LIFE."

Dion and I were at dinner with Jill and Joe Menza at Giardino D'Oro, which is nestled on winding Gold Street in Manhattan's venerable Financial District. The restaurant had the charm of Italy, a Venetian feel. And it lived up to its name: The Golden Garden.

We were talking about how children grow up and, over time, develop attitudes, ideas, and beliefs of their own. Many times, their points of view differ from those of their parents, and it can become highly sensitive and tense within the home. Sometimes parents could really get offended over something that was said.

Dion slapped the table. "I have a story for you. Now, this happened more than forty years ago. One day, my eighteen-year-old daughter said something that offended me. I don't even remember what it was now, but I do recall being really hurt. So, I left the house and started walking down the street in my neighborhood. I thought to myself—*Here's my daughter, whom I've been concerned*

about for eighteen years. I took her to the pediatrician, the dentist, school, activities, to get her hair done, her nails, and so on. Now, she's *telling* me *how it is?* I was really offended."

Dion took a sip of his sparkling San Pellegrino water and continued.

"I was so angry. I kept walking and ended up passing a Methodist church near my house. I heard this beautiful sound coming from inside. I slowly walked into this house of God and snuck into a pew in the back. An amazing American gospel singer, Cynthia Clawson, was singing "My Redeemer Lives." I calmed down and began listening to the words. I realized I didn't have a role model for what to do with an eighteen-year-old girl. I had no clue! My father, God bless him, was an emotional twelve-year-old. I couldn't look to him on how to raise and speak to my daughter."

Dion paused.

"And then, I heard the words of the song. 'I know my Redeemer lives.' The very same God that spins things in orbit, runs to hold me when I'm broken. He conquered death to bring me victory.'

Then Dion looked around the table at Jill, Joe, and me.

"I had this thought: *I know—I'll use Jesus as my model, my father figure*. There was Jesus, nails driven through his wrists and feet fastening him to the cross. Stripped of his clothes, beaten, mocked, spit on, with a crown of thorns digging into his head. Was he offended? No. He said, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.' "

Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.

"That was my go-to! My shoulders grew ten feet wide. I went home and walked in calmly. I passed my daughter sitting at the kitchen table. I lovingly kissed her on the head. 'Yo, kid, you doing all right?' I thought, *I don't care what she responds with. She could rip me into two thousand little pieces, and every torn part of me would still scream out 'I love you*.' And you want to know what happened after that?"

Jill, Joe, and I were mesmerized. I felt so blessed that other people could witness these powerful conversations. We all nodded *yes* in unison.

Dion combed his salt-and-pepper goatee with his right hand. "I haven't been offended since. Because I detached with love. I enjoy my kids. I don't judge them. My kids don't have to live up to my expectations. I don't demand respect from them. I adore all three of

my daughters, and, in return, they feel comfortable around me. They come to me openly, lovingly, and with great respect. That day, I grew broad shoulders."

Dion and Adam. Mentorship–passing it on.

Jill Menza and Susan DiMucci, at the opening night of *The Wanderer*.

Jill Menza and Adam Jablin enjoying the liquid sunshine at Dion's Stomping Ground—the Bronx.

Jill Menza and Dion on 187th Street in the Bronx.

35.

Rock ’n’ Roll Q&A with Dion

“After all, who could be hipper than Dion?” With that question, Lou Reed inducted his fellow New Yorker into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Dion (his unspoken last name is DiMucci) was one of the early Rockers, making his debut on the charts at age eighteen in 1957. He was still charting in the late ’60s. His hits are standards in period films and on oldies stations: “Teenager in Love,” “Runaround Sue,” “The Wanderer,” “Ruby Baby,” and “Abraham, Martin, and John.” He’s one of two US pop stars to appear on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Bob Dylan is the other). The difference between Dion and his contemporaries is that he’s still making new music today. His album *Blues with Friends*, was *Billboard*’s number-one disc for the year 2020. At press-time, his follow-up, *Stomping Ground*, seems on track toward similar success. The recent albums include collaborations with Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, Van Morrison, and other notables. Bob Dylan and Pete Townshend wrote liner notes and praised the music inside. In this interview, *Literary Matters*’ editor in chief, Ryan Wilson, endeavors to answer Lou Reed’s question and get to the heart of Dion’s hipness.

Your voice has been praised—by Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Lou Reed—as the authentic voice of Rock ’n’ Roll. Your rhythm, your effects, and your attitude arrived in 1957 as something astonishingly new. Where did you get it all? What

were the elements that went into that voice?

DION: The sounds inside your head are shaped by the sounds coming in from outside. The mix and the proportions are up to God. What I made of them, I guess, was up to me.

I grew up in Belmont, the Little Italy of the Bronx, and life was full of music. Opera was everywhere. My grandfather listened to it, and so did my uncles. Enrico Caruso had been dead for a generation, but he was alive in my extended family. The men had these old black 78s they'd spin on the Victrola, and the kids would have to stop running around the room. I remember getting chills hearing Caruso sing "Nessun Dorma," the aria from Puccini's *Turandot*.

My father also filled our little Bronx apartment with Louis Prima, Al Jolson, and Burl Ives.

There was music everywhere outdoors, too. I remember walking by a synagogue one Saturday in the summer, and the windows were open, and I could hear the cantor singing inside at the top of his lungs. His delivery was so exotic and so haunting that it stopped me in my tracks. It was like nothing I'd ever heard before. I stood there outside in the heat, soaking it in, wondering how I could do what that guy was doing. It was that sound I was trying to capture in the opening phrases of "Born to Cry," a song that charted for me in 1962.

The radio brought a lot of good music into my life. I was influenced by Jimmy Reed and all the Black doo-wop groups. But it was hearing Hank Williams that changed my life—his commitment to the lyric—the way he would bite into the words and rip them off at the end. I wanted to communicate like that. I wanted to live the life he sang in his "Luke the Drifter" series.

So that's what my ears were taking in. It was all the Bronx, though the Bronx opened out onto a wider world. And what was true in 1957 is still true today. My latest album is titled *Stomping Ground*, and that's what it's all about. The neighborhood is the sound I'm trying to capture.

I suspect that's what Dylan and Springsteen and Lou were talking about when they talked about my music. It's the sound of my streets and my home amplified through my voice and my guitar.

You were writing music when you were a teenager. What did you value in a lyric at the time?

DION: Definitely the sound of the words. They had to feel right coming out of my mouth when I was singing them. The meaning wasn't as important as the sound.

These were the years when we were inventing doo-wop. We sang harmony on the street corners. On Friday and Saturday nights, we'd take the train to Harlem and go to the shows at the Apollo Theater. Afterward, on the ride home, we'd try to use our voices to imitate the various instruments. We'd come up with nonsense syllables to catch the sound—one guy going "din din din" for the bass, and another guy wailing "ooh ooh oh ooh" for the trumpet, another guy going "wawa wawa" for the sax. You get the idea. It wasn't words. It didn't need to make sense. But it felt right coming out of your mouth, and, of course, you always needed the rock rhythm. Put it all together, and it was so sweet on the ear when you heard it. The sound was everything.

That was the foundation of doo-wop. Maybe there was a top layer of love song, but all the filler and all the harmonies were made up of that kind of sound.

There was an art to it. We were precise about it. I remember when I was writing "Runaround Sue" with Ernie Maresca, I wrote the nonsense syllables out on big sheets for the singers to read: "Hape hape bum da hey de hey de." Every vowel and every consonant had to be just right, or you lost the effect.

But sound wasn't everything in those songs. The lyrics were clever. You were going for something more.

DION: You're right about that. Sound was primary, but it wasn't everything. The first song I ever wrote was "Born to Cry." I wrote it when I was fifteen, and it was an anthem of teen angst. "There's

so much evil round us, I feel that I could die / And I know, yeah, that I was born to cry . . . The things I like and wanna have I can't even buy / But I know, yeah, that I was born to cry." In my teenage way, I was aiming for self-expression.

So were my contemporaries. Some critics act as if social commentary was invented in the sixties, but it was going on in the fifties, sometimes very subtly. Rage is great, but it's not the only kind of expression.

What I wanted to do back then was take people on a trip. My own home life was a mess. My parents yelled at each other all the time. When they wanted to take a break from their argument, they'd yell at me and my sisters. Music took me away from all that. It made my problems go away. In a song you can present a problem in the first verse and solve it by the third. Now, wasn't that easy? At a very early age, I found that I could do that for people. I could sing, and it would take them away from their troubles.

In your childhood, radio was emerging as a medium primarily for music. How did that affect your creative development? What were the other major factors?

DION: Radio was like magic to me. I'd turn the dial and hear music I could never hear otherwise. I tuned in a station from Wheeling, West Virginia, that broadcast the blues. Man, it was like a religious experience.

After school, I'd run home to catch the last half-hour of the *Don Larkin Country Show* coming out of Newark. That's where I discovered Hank Williams, who became my hero and role model. I couldn't believe the things he was doing with his voice. My uncles would sing Italian songs, and they'd give everything this tremolo effect I couldn't stand. But Hank Williams would squeak and squawk and yodel, and I'd sit there laughing like a crazy kid—laughing with delight.

As soon as the show was over, I'd rush downstairs to the front stoop to sing "Honky-Tonk Blues" and "Jambalaya." My friends would ask me, "What's that all about? What's a honky-tonk? What's

jambalaya?" I had no idea, but they sure sounded good coming out of my mouth. I got a reputation in the neighborhood as the "Bronx Hillbilly."

Radio was my introduction to the great big world. Nothing on Earth moved me like country and the blues. Nothing could have given me a better preparation for the coming of rock 'n' roll.

In memoirs and interviews you've mentioned a number of influences in your development as a songwriter: Hank Williams, of course, but also Doc Pomus, Roy Orbison, Carole King. What did they teach you?

DION: Doc Pomus was like a second father to me. My own father was a piece of work. I loved him, but I didn't want to be like him. In all his life he never had a real job. He never filled out an income-tax form because he never earned enough money for it to matter. I wanted to work hard and succeed at something that mattered, something important. Success came for me when I was seventeen and I signed a big recording contract. At the time, Doc was half of the hottest new songwriting team in the business: Pomus–Shuman. I knew I had arrived when my label hired them to write me a hit.

Pomus–Shuman wrote many of the signature songs of the era. "Save the Last Dance for Me," "This Magic Moment"—when you think of the fifties, it's their tunes that run through your mind.

But, for me, Doc was a grown-up who was making a living doing what I considered the most important thing. He was creating music.

Still, he wore it lightly. He knew that my swagger was mostly a show—underneath I was an insecure mess—and he encouraged me as a singer and a songwriter. I would put my ideas out there, and it meant the world to me when he liked them. Doc gave me confidence, and he helped ease my way into adulthood. Doc and I shared a love for the blues. Big Joe Turner was his favorite.

The songwriting process back then was a real collaboration, and Doc and Mort worked closely with me on the composition of "A Teenager in Love," which went platinum for me in 1959. I can't think of a better way to learn the craft than to sit in a room with those guys. I never finished high school, but this was the most amazing educational opportunity. Who needs Harvard?

You mentioned Roy Orbison, and I had a similar chance with

him. We were touring, and I sat down next to him on the bus and just asked him flat out to teach me everything he knew about songwriting. He laughed. Then he told me he liked to think of a theme—say, transportation—and then make a list of words that fit the theme, and then write a lyric from the list.

Okay, so transportation—I made a list of ways to get from one place to another: helicopter, jet, water ski, circus cannon, taxi, hot-air balloon . . . You get the idea. And from that list I wrote my song "I've Got to Get to You."

I'LL TAKE A HELICOPTER OR A CONCORD JET, A CREAKY
ELEVATOR OR A RED CORVETTE.
I'LL WATER-SKI AN OCEAN, RIDE A TUGBOAT TOO.
THERE ISN'T A SINGLE THING THAT I WOULDN'T DO.
I'VE GOT TO GET TO YOU.

What a breakthrough! I asked a simple question, and I got not only a new song but also a pretty reliable cure for writer's block.

Same holds for my time with Carole King. She and her husband, Gerry Goffin, were the power couple of popular music. I worked with them on "This Little Girl of Mine." And I recorded other

Goffin–King numbers. This was a decade before *Tapestry*, but I knew I was working with a genius when I sat at a piano with Carole King. I tried to soak in as much as I could.

Though you were writing songs, your early hits were mostly written by others—the big names in the Brill Building. Why was that? Did it bother you?

DION: No, it never bothered me. It's still doesn't bother me. I do like writing my own songs because they're a more perfect expression of how I'm seeing things and what I want to say. But a good song is a good song whether it's by Goffin and King or Lieber and Stoller or whatever. If it's good, I'm all for it.

I had the chance to sit with Doc Pomus and learn the art from a true master. I was able to craft songs with Carole King. Waiting is hard, but it serves its own purpose in the development of an artist.

You were the first rock artist to be signed by an "establishment" label, Columbia Records. That was a seismic event in the music business. How did it influence your music?

DION: It was strange. Columbia didn't want to miss out on the tidal wave that was rock 'n' roll; at the same time, they were sure it was going to recede at any moment. They thought it was a fad that was just about to pass.

So, their idea was to take a top-selling rock artist—me—and groom him to be the next Frank Sinatra. They wanted me to wear a tux and sing the Great American Songbook.

Look, I love Sinatra. I love the Great American Songbook. But that's not what I'm hearing in my head, and it never was. Columbia and I didn't see eye to eye about the future of anything.

But again, I was young, and I was learning. I got to sit in John Hammond's office and listen to the blues. I got to walk through the halls and talk music with Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan.

Meanwhile, I recorded a vault full of music that Columbia refused to release. I had fallen in love with the blues by then, but blues had a pretty tiny audience, and the label wasn't much interested in reaching those people. In 1965, I recorded the album *Kickin' Child*, which I think is one of my best—and one of the best of its era—but it didn't see the light of day until 2017.

At Columbia, I was surrounded by the best talent, and I was composing and recording at peak performance. But it was going nowhere. As I said, it took me decades to get those sessions out of the vault and into people's headphones.

You're open about the fact that you were using hard drugs and were addicted to alcohol from age fourteen. What effect did addiction have on your music?

DION:I've been clean and sober for more than fifty years. My life is so much better since I cleared my head. Addiction was destroying my family and my friendships. My life was crashing and burning in so many ways.

But, you know what? It never touched the music. I listen now to the music I made from age fifteen to twenty-nine, and I can't find any defect that I can blame on addiction. I can't explain it, but I can't deny it, either.

I know some people give drugs all the credit for their good songs, and I certainly don't want to do that. Heroin didn't inspire me to do anything. If I had stayed on it, or if I had kept drinking, I would have been dead a long time ago—and I would have died estranged from all the people I love. Instead, I stayed alive and kept on doing my thing. I've made more music and much better music off drugs than on.

Bob Dylan is the only rock artist to win the Nobel Prize for his work. You met him when he got his first gigs outside Minnesota. How did you see him grow? Did his early successes influence your writing or performance?

DION:I met Dylan when he got his first big break in music.

In 1959, I was headlining the Winter Dance Party Tour with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper. I don't have to tell anyone the story of what happened, do I? February 3 was "the day the music died." The plane crashed with all those guys on it. I was the only headliner who had taken the bus instead, and so I was the only one who survived.

But the show had to go on. I was torn to pieces inside, but the promoters insisted we had to finish the tour. They brought in replacements for all the acts that were missing. Bobby Vee came in from Minnesota with his band, and on keyboards was a kid named Bob Zimmerman, who was working under the alias "Elston Gunnn." That's right: Gunnn, with three n's at the end. In a few years, the world would know him as Bob Dylan.

Bob and I haunted the halls together at Columbia when he first broke through. I loved his music, though it couldn't be more different from my own. If I write a song with eight-syllable lines, the lines are gonna have eight syllables. Bob just doesn't care if some of his lines have seventeen instead.

But the guy can pull it off. There's no doubt about that. I mentioned earlier that I consider *Kickin' Child* to be one of my greatest efforts. Well, that album had four Dylan covers on it, and I'm proud of every one of them.

We've stayed in touch. We've toured together. Maybe fifteen years ago, we did a series of shows together in New York City. In 2020, Bob wrote the liner notes for my album *Blues with Friends*, and he praised my songwriting. As far as I know, he's the only Nobel Prize winner to do that.

Has he influenced my work? Of course, he has. He opened up the range of topics you could treat in a song. I don't think "Abraham, Martin, and John," my big hit of 1968, would have been possible if Dylan hadn't prepared the way with his socially conscious songs.

You've developed over time—from a singer who writes songs to a singer-songwriter. How did that happen?

DION: Success won me more freedom. By the late 1960s, I was pretty well established, and I could do what I wanted. I wasn't looking to earn a lot more money. My back catalog was performing pretty well for me. I wasn't trying to win the respect of critics or crowds. I was making the music I wanted to make, and it was doing what music is supposed to do. It was reaching people. I've never stopped making new music, and I've always had an audience.

You've had long relationships of collaboration in your songwriting—forty years with Bill Tuohy, ten years with Mike Aquilina. That's unusual in your business. What's your creative process? How exactly do you and your partners go about writing songs?

DION: My secret is to make friends with guys who have a lot of patience. I can be a perfectionist, but those guys have respected that.

My process is pretty much as I described it earlier. I find words or phrases that feel good when I sing them. Most of the time, it's just the sound I love. What amazes me is how Bill or Mike can take a single word or a small phrase and build a world around it. They'll use it to spin a story or create a character.

Both men were good friends of mine before they were my lyricists. So, they *knew* me. They had a sense of the sounds I like to sing—and the kinds of words I like to avoid. If I don't like a line, my complaint is usually: "We don't say that in the Bronx."

They knew my story, too. So, they could draw from my real life to fill in the blanks. Some years back, I came up with a tune, and the only lyric I had was the refrain "Here in America, here in America." Mike heard my demo once, and he knew that the song would be about my tour with Sam Cooke in the Jim Crow South.

With Bill and Mike, the friendship came first, before the collaboration, and the songs have grown out of the friendship.

I wonder what "The Wanderer" means to you after so many decades. That is, you spent decades moving from genre to genre—pop to gospel to blues—winning awards and charting now and then. But as soon as you seemed to establish a pattern, you moved on. How do you explain your shifts? What is it that has kept you stylistically wandering?

DION:I love that song. After sixty years, I still love performing it. I do wish people would pay closer attention to the lyrics. I've had listeners complain that it's misogynistic. Come on! Have you never heard of *satire*? Other people think I'm just making fun of overconfident Guidos. But the guy in the title role is more complex than that. He says he's "happy as a clown." But in art—in opera, literature, painting—clowns are notoriously unhappy. Remember Verdi's aria? "Even though your heart is breaking, laugh, clown, laugh." There's more to the Wanderer than meets the ear of someone who's not listening closely. He's got "two fists of iron," but he feels he's "going nowhere."

That song was such a hit for me that, eventually, I became

identified with it. I had to accept the fact that people will always think the character is me, just because I sing it persuasively. I'm okay with that. Like "Runaround Sue," "The Wanderer" was based on a real character in my neighborhood. I find him interesting, and I've returned to that persona repeatedly, in "King of the New York Streets" and "Gangster of Love" and other tunes. They're all crowd-pleasers.

But you're talking about another kind of wandering, and you're right. I'm restless. I need to work. I need to explore. I need to try new techniques. I like to work with different artists. I've been nominated or won awards in pop, gospel, blues. I still love it all—all the songs, all the styles.

But I never leave anything behind. If you listen to me play all the songs right now, just me and my guitar, you'd hear that it's all Dion music. When you talk about my wandering, I believe you're talking about the window trimmings.

Does your reading influence your songwriting? What were you reading when you wrote your early hits? What do you read these days?

DION: When I was young, I was more fascinated by the visual arts than the literary arts. My dad would take me to MoMA and the Met, and he'd point out the elements of style that made each painter unique—Monet, Degas, Dali. I couldn't get enough of it. When I had spare cash, I would buy big books about the painters and their works. I remember a book I had about Monet, and in one photograph he sat—white-haired and bearded—in the midst of his large, extended family. I looked at it and said, "I want to be that guy."

Eventually I did take up painting. I'm no Monet, but definitely good enough for a couple of my album covers.

These days I read a lot of history and biography. Lately I've been listening more. I like to do audio-books while I'm walking in the morning. It's easier on my eyes. I'm a voracious consumer of scripture and theology, Christian and Jewish. The subject matter of those books is God and creation, and that covers everything in every song I've ever written. So, yeah, my reading feeds my writing!

A lot of your recent work has been in the blues genre. The blues, of course, transformed American music, but the blues also transformed American poetry through the work of tremendous talents like Sterling A. Brown and Langston Hughes. What is the continuing appeal of the blues to you? What do you think theb Blues offers you, as an artist, that other genres don't?

DION:I define the blues as the naked cry of the human heart longing for God. It's the most demanding art. I can't believe it when I hear people dismiss it as primitive. They act as if you're cutting corners because you get to repeat the first line in the AAB form. Have they ever tried writing *one* line that's worth repeating? You might as well dismiss the blues for being pentatonic. It's easier—right?—because you have fewer notes to choose from.

No, it's not. The constraints of the form make it more demanding. It's harder to excel, harder to set yourself apart. You have to do more with less. I mean that as a guitarist as well as a singer. You can't waste words when listeners are going to hear them twice.

I seem to have fallen back into the blues full-time, like I was in the early to mid-sixties. It was my friends Bonnie Raitt and Van Morrison who first urged me to revisit these roots. Then I got a Grammy nomination for my album *Bronx in Blue*. And lately I've had the pleasure of hearing my songs performed by some of the great masters, Sonny Landreth and Joe Louis Walker and Joe Bonamassa. I'm pleased to say I wrote the title track on Joe Louis Walker's most recent album.

Your most recent album, *Blues with Friends*, was the #1 blues album of 2020 on the *Billboard* charts. Of course, a tremendous number of Americans were introduced to your music by your appearances on *American Bandstand* with Dick Clark back in the late fifties and early sixties. My mother grew up in poverty in Alabama, and one of the first things she ever saw on a TV set was one of your performances on *Bandstand*. That is, not only were your songs playing on radio stations across the country, but you were also appearing on that new medium, television. This kind of fame had to be startling. How did you deal with so

much fame at such a young age? How has your relationship to fame and popular success shifted over the years?

DION:I wasn't ready for fame. I wasn't ready to have so much money or freedom or power, and I didn't use those things well. Thank God for my wife, who drove me sane and helped me to sober up and enjoy life. My relationship to fame changed when I stopped caring about it—when I removed it as a goal—and I needed to get sober before I could do that.

The critic Dave Marsh noted almost twenty years ago that you were the only artist from your generation producing new music. Everybody else is on the nostalgia bus. Last year Bruce Springsteen made the same observation in a *Wall Street Journal* interview and emphasized how singular this is. What makes you continue to produce new work at an age when nobody else does?

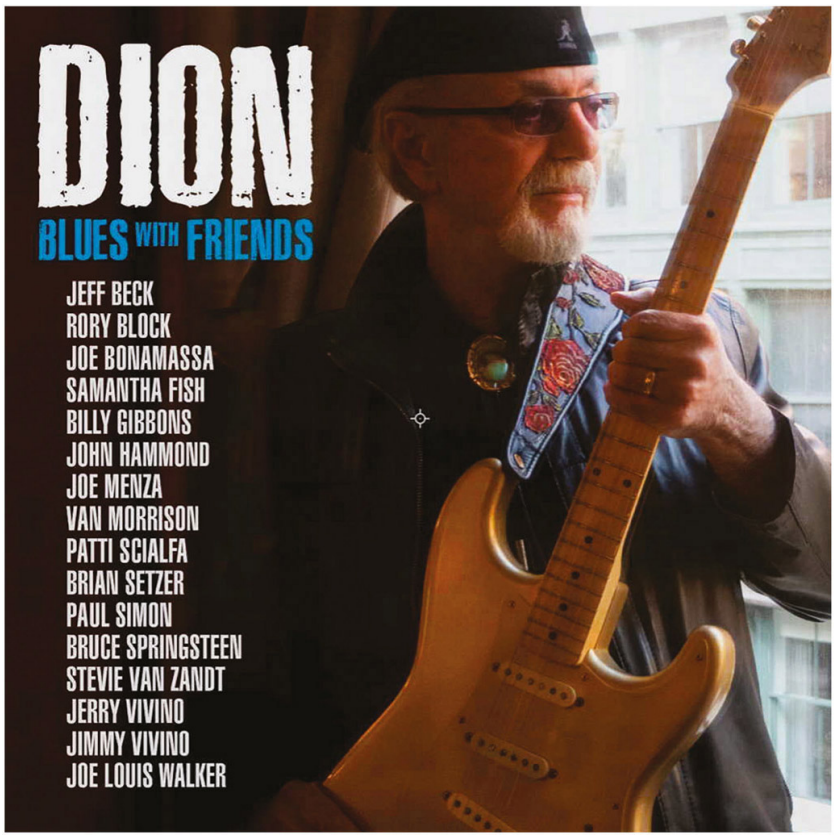
DION: Look, I don't want to knock the nostalgia bus. All those artists made amazing music in the fifties and sixties, and people still want to hear it today. If you've scored one hit, you've made a million people smile. If they still want to hear your hit sixty years later, you have something you deserve to feel really good about.

Look at me. I'm eighty-one years old, and I'm still singing "Teenager in Love" at every show. I do it because people want it, and because I love those people, and because I love Doc Pomus, who wrote the song. Frankly, I have newer songs I'd rather sing, but the show is not just about me. It's also about the people who helped to make me who I am—the people behind the songs and the people in the audience.

I am a restless soul, and I need to keep making new music. Why is that? I'm not sure, but I think it's because music itself isn't the end for me. When musicians are young, they make music for lots of different reasons. They have lots of different motives. They want respect. They want money. They want to get laid. They want easy access to drugs. Some of those motives can keep you going for ten years or even twenty, but not much beyond that. At a certain point, you can just keep doing the same show and still get what you want out of it. You don't have to go through the trouble of making new

music—because it is a lot of trouble. You can just show up and sing the old hits, and you'll get what you want out of them.

But it's different if you think your art is not for you. If you believe your art glorifies God, you're going to keep doing it as long as you can still breathe. When I make music, I feel like I'm crazy King David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, singing a new song just because I'm still newly in love, or belting out the blues as a psalm of lament. As long as I can still breathe, I hope to be newly in love with the God who made me. He always gives me something to sing about.



Supersonic Attractions presents
"FRANKIE and JOHNNY"
SAM COOKE
"BE CAREFUL OF STONES THAT YOU THROW"
DION
ALL IN PERSON
AL "TNT" BRAGGS
BOBBY LAMONT
ELOISE HESTON
WAYNE BENNETT and his GUITAR
"CALL ON ME"
BOBBY BLUE BLAND
and the BOBBY BLAND REVUE
"LEAVE ME ALONE"
BABY WASHINGTON
"WONDERFUL, WONDERFUL"
LITTLE WILLIE JOHN
"SO MUCH IN LOVE"
The KING PINS
"IT WON'T BE THIS WAY ALWAYS"
The TYMES
Freddie SCOTT
GORGEOUS GEORGE M.C.
JOE SCOTT AND HIS ALL STAR RECORDING ORCHESTRA

36.

Here in America (Song for Sam Cooke)

YOU SANG "YOU SEND ME," I SANG "I WONDER WHY?"
I STILL WONDER, YOU WERE WAY TOO YOUNG TO DIE

"Yo D, someone showed me this poster with you on tour with Sam Cooke, Bobby Blue Bland and Little Willie John. It was taken in 1963. I was looking at it and I was taken back. You were the only white guy on the tour—that's extraordinary for the time. There was a lot of racial tension and segregation in our country back then. It really showed me you were the man you are and were. What was it like for you? What did you experience?"

"It was very different for a guy like me from New York. There was racism in the North, don't get me wrong. But it wasn't as obvious or prevalent. Prejudice and discrimination ran deep in the Jim Crow South. I was on tour with Sam Cooke for about a month and we got really close. Sam was a beautiful guy—a preacher's son. He lived his faith through brotherhood, not politics. He did it out of befriending you, loving you and living the gospel. I ran across some really crazy times with him, and saw Sam in a lot of different situations, conditions, and circumstances. He never lost his cool. People said things to my friend that made the hair curl on the back of my neck. Sam never got his feathers ruffled. I was ready to punch some guys out! One time I said, 'Sam, why don't you whack that guy up side the head?'

"He responded, 'Dion, judging somebody by the color of their

skin is a peculiar way to become a man.'

"And, that's when I figured out, he's the smartest guy in the room.

"He showed me that when race matters to you, you become a racist.

"One evening Sam took Bobby 'Blue' Bland, Susan and me to a small club in Memphis to catch James Brown and the Flames. Nobody knew who James Brown was at this time, it was before he made it big. He was the local act. In this club, Susan and I stood out. We were the only white couple in the room and the patrons of the club gave us some looks. 'Who are those people?'

"But, Sam had our backs! 'They're with me,' he said.

"He was a man that wanted to change the world, but he did it through his songs, through his lyrics, through living out the gospel, through loving people, through friendship and brotherhood.

"I wrote this song HERE IN AMERICA—A SONG FOR SAM COOKE with my writing partner Mike Aquilina. It was in my drawer for years until I saw the movie *Green Book*, Inspired by a true story in the Deep South where an African American pianist is being protected by an Italian American bouncer. I thought; wow, I Identified with this movie but it was the reverse! Sam protected me. He was a man of integrity and immense courage. I recorded the song with Paul Simon—check out the lyrics."

Here in America—A Song for Sam Cooke

We traveled this land back in 1962
We played the places that were home to me and you
We drove to Memphis, we rocked a set
We walked the streets at night and smoked a cigarette
Here in America
Here in America

There was so much I didn't know
About the way that life could go
Here in America.

Down the block I saw the people stop and stare
You did your best to make a Yankee boy aware
I never thought about the color of your skin
I never worried 'bout the hotel I was in

Here in America
Here in America

But the places I could stay
They all made you walk away
Here in America
You were the man who earned the glory and the fame
But cowards felt that they could call you any name

You were the star, standing in the light
That won you nothing on a city street at night
Here in America
Here in America

You were told that we were free
This land is made for you and me
Here in America

You stayed more steady than a backbeat on a drum
You told me you believed a change was gonna come
You sang for freedom, but lived life free
I saw it in your smile and in your dignity
Here in America
Here in America

A preacher's kid you'd always be
Singing the truth to set us free
Here in America
Here in America

You were a star when you were standing on a stage
I look back on it, I feel a burning rage You sang
"You Send Me, " I sang "I Wonder Why"
I still wonder, you were way too young to die
Here in America
Here in America

Hey Sam, I wish that you were near
I wish that you were here
Here in America

37.

Dr. Dion

"I GOT THE PRESCRIPTION. I GOT IT RIGHT HERE.
GOT SOMETHING TO WHISPER, WHISPER IN YOUR EAR.
TAKE ME TWO TIMES DAILY. TAKE ME TWO TIMES SLOW.
TAKE ME RIGHT THERE WITH YOU, EVERYWHERE YOU GO.
ONE THING'S FOR CERTAIN, ONE THING FOR SURE.
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, I GOT THE CURE."

Dion and I were in the Bronx—his old stomping ground. At the time, *Stomping Ground*—his album that featured legends like Bruce Springsteen, Patti Scialfa, Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, Joe Bonamassa, Mark Knopfler, Billy Gibbons, Boz Scaggs, Rickie Lee Jones, and Keb Mo—was dominating the charts.

Dion pointed to a giant gate with wrought-iron spears.

"Adam, this huge barrier runs from Southern Boulevard to Third Avenue on the north side of the Belmont section. It separated Fordham University from my little neighborhood. I was on one side of that wall, a young kid listening to Hank Williams. And on the other side was a great Jesuit university that was established in 1841."

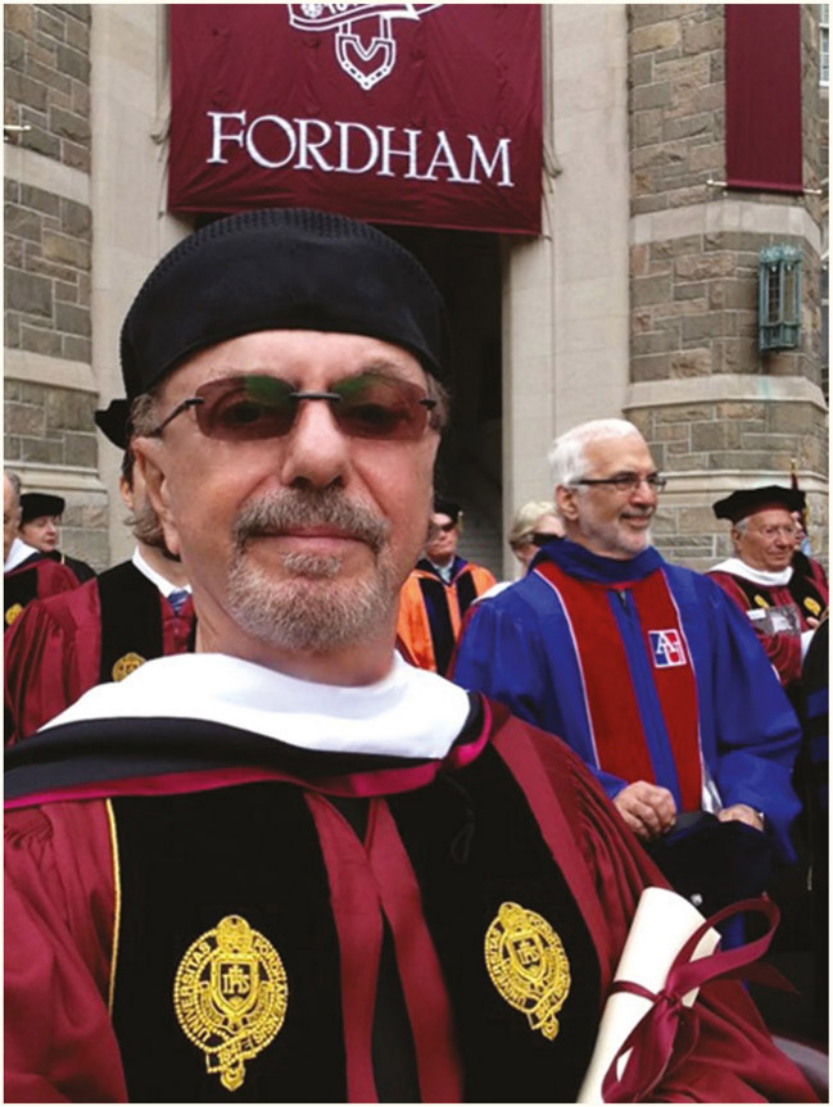
A New York energy overflowed at the university that prided itself on 192 Fulbright Scholars, 658 prestigious scholarships in the

last five years, 78 percent health-professional school acceptance, and more than a million community-service hours annually. Not to mention their great football and basketball teams.

"There was definitely a wall, and I had to get over it to find out what was on the other side. Now, when I was growing up, my parents never even mentioned the word *college*. They were too busy fighting over the rent money, which was thirty-six dollars monthly. I was curious. I convinced my buddies to climb over that wrought-iron fence late one night. It was crazy, because they had security guards on the other side of that intimidating barricade. That night when we were climbing over, my friend Louie slipped and got his arm caught on one of the spikes. We had to lift him off. From that day forward, Louie was known as Louie Spike in the neighborhood. Adam, with all our gymnastics, I still didn't know the first thing about college, but I wanted to know.

"In 2013, I got the surprise of a lifetime! I was contacted by Fordham University. I was voted to be a recipient of an honorary doctorate in humanities. I grew up less than two blocks away from the distinguished university, not caring anything about a college education or people. But at seventy years old, with forty-five years of recovery and helping others—I received a doctorate. It's beautiful to see God's handiwork in my life. However, I said to Susan, 'Why on earth are they giving me a doctorate in humanities when I didn't even graduate high school?' And I'll never forget my Susan's words to me that day: 'Dion, you have the life experience. You deserve it.' "

My mentor received his second doctorate in 2023 from Ave Maria University!



Proud for being honored with a doctorate at Fordham University, 2013.

Dion's father took him downtown to James J. Kriegman, the premier photographer, because he knew forty Hank Williams songs at the age of thirteen. Dion is sitting with an L-1 Gibson guitar, a vintage classic his mother bought for $8 in a pawn shop (worth $8,000 today)—a good bargain.

Adam Jablin filming Dion for “Angel in the Alleyway” at the ancient Spanish monastery in North Miami.

Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza and owner of the Detroit Tigers, with Dion at Ave Maria University, where Dion was honored with another doctorate in 2023.

Getting another honorary doctorate at Ave Maria "will keep me humble," says Dion.

38.

I Had a Dream

"He freed lotta people but it seems the good, they die young I just look around and he's gone."

—"Abraham, Martin, and John"

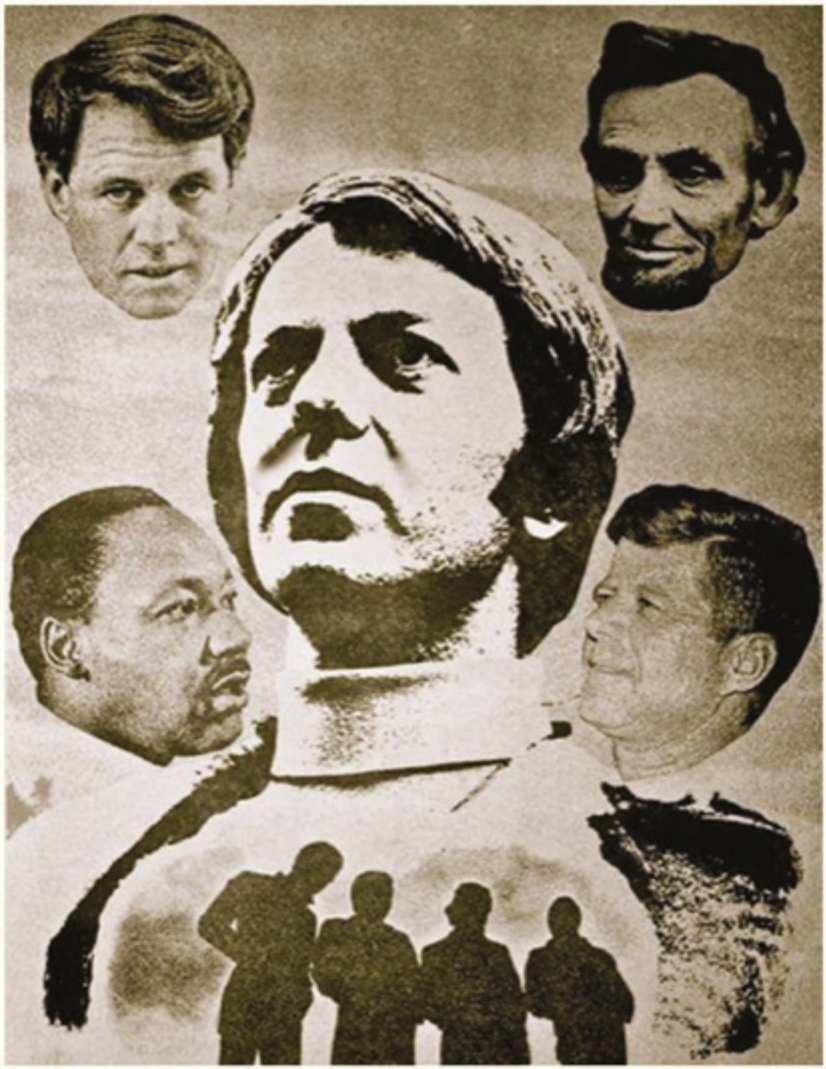
In 1989, Arsenio Hall asked me to do his late-night talk show for Martin Luther King. I would share with him and the audience the song "Abraham, Martin, and John." When he introduced me and I came out onstage and sat in the main chair, he asked me about the origins of the song.

I told him in the interview that when I first started playing rock 'n' roll, most songs were played in a major key. It was a happy time, and you could find groups and solo artists on an album cover looking straight into the camera with big smiles. I explained to Arsenio that there was a major shift in the music business after November 22, 1963—the day John F. Kennedy got shot. It seemed like it rained for five days straight, and rock 'n' roll took a turn downward five octaves; Bob Dylan came out with "The Times They Are A-Changin," Marvin Gaye came out with "What's Going On?" and The Temptations came out with "War (What Is It Good For?)." Bob Dylan was recording masterpiece songs, ripping the masks off of people's faces, bringing it all into the light. He was very biblical and truth-based. After 1963, you couldn't find an album cover with anybody smiling into the camera.

I described to Arsenio that before MLK got shot, I was working Las Vegas in the mid-sixties. People I loved and adored, like Sammy Davis, Jr., Lena Horne, and Harry Belafonte—whose names were on

the marquee and were headliners in the main rooms of these famous casinos—could not enter the hotel's front entrance, couldn't walk through the main lobby, or swim in the pool. They had to enter the casino from the back because of segregation. I shared with Arsenio that there was something wrong with that. It was weird. I told him it was peculiar, and we did not experience that in the Bronx.

After MLK was assassinated on April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy delivered a beautiful speech explaining that he was a special man who had "dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort." He then asked the United States of America, *What kind of nation are we, and what direction do we want to move in—bitterness, hatred, revenge?* RFK asked the country to be like MLK and to fill their hearts and understand one another. Then he asked, *Who is going to be the next victim of a senseless act like this?* Two months later, on June 5, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was shot dead right here in Los Angeles, California.



The *New York Post* centerfold depicting "Abraham, Martin, and John," Dion's national hit in 1969.

I told him the song "Abraham, Martin, and John" was born out of that frustration.

After singing it on the Arsenio Hall Show stage, Quincy Jones came out from the green room onto the main stage. He was waiting in the back. He walked directly to me, hugged me, looked me right in the eye, and said, "Dion, I need to tell you—you are one highly

evolved spiritual man."

I told Quincy, "You can kill the dreamer, but you cannot kill the dream. You and I will pick up on it and carry it further. There is a state of love that *does* exist, and it's for us to work at it and make it visible in this world."

The program cover for the 1989 induction cermoney to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame—with likenesses of Dion, The Rolling Stones, Otis Redding, The Temptations, and Stevie Wonder—some of the other inductees for that year.

39.

46 Servants

Gratitude Is a Superpower

Dion and I were out and about in Boca Raton, Florida, with some friends. A dear friend of ours, who is worth quite a bit of money, was complaining about the economy, stock market, real estate, politics, private schools for his children, and the recent gas prices.

There truly was *no gratitude*.

Just then, Dion interrupted him and said, "Yo—what are you talking about? This is the greatest country on Earth, not to mention you have forty-six servants I can think of right off the top of my head!"

"Forty-six servants?" our pal asked, baffled.

Dion smiled from ear to ear. "Yeah, you got . . .

1. refrigerator
2. freezer
3. oven
4. stove
5. toaster
6. mixer

7. running water, hot *and* cold

8. lights on and off with a click of a switch

9. air-conditioning

10. microwave

11. blender

12. vacuum cleaner

13. car

14. computer

15. iPhone

16. copy machine

17. scanner

18. CD player

19. washing machine

20. dryer

21. dishwasher

22. coffee machine

23. voicemail

24. dictation

25. hearing aids

26. a credit card

27. television set

28. remote control

29. radio

30. mail carrier

31. garbage collector

32. landscaper

33. pool-maintenance person

34. an exterminator

35. printer

36. alarm system and alarm clock

37. eyeglasses

38. massage chair

39. electrical outlets throughout your home

40. intercom

41. hair dryer

42. electric razor

43. heating pad

44. air purifier

45. garbage disposal

46. sprinklers

The lesson is, we have it so much better than people think. There's a true lack of gratitude for what we have these days. To be ungrateful in this country is bizarro!!! Gratitude is a superpower.

DION
AN AMERICAN HERO
FEAT. CARLENE CARTER

40.

An American Idea

"BUT WHAT IF NO ONE STOOD TO PLAY THE PART?
BUT WHAT IF NO ONE HAD A HERO'S HEART?"

I grew up in the fifties. At that time, it seemed the Catholic Church was married to the Democratic Party. Classic liberalism was about individual rights—that each citizen should be treated equally under the law. We believed in our God-given rights, not the ones given to us by the government. If they came from the government, they could be taken away by the government and the powers that be. No, back in my day, they believed in limited government and the quest for ever-greater freedom, equality, and autonomy for each man and woman—the pursuit of happiness!

Martin Luther King Jr., was a Christian minister who led the way in the sixties. He was led by moral principles and a Higher Power. He was responsible and accountable to God.

Now, the way I look at it is, I'm a New Yorker . . . and I'm a rock 'n' roller. No one has more free will than me. Man, when it comes to free will, I don't have 100 percent—I have 300 hundred percent. But with my free will, I choose to acknowledge a moral framework that does not come from me alone. It comes from a Higher Power. Our Founding Fathers knew that; they put that in place. The civil rights movement knew that if race matters to you, you are a racist.

The Rev. Dr. King implored us not to judge anyone by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

These ideas are the opposite of what they call "woke" today. They believe that truth is relative, and there is no authority or Higher Power. In that culture, there is no forgiveness. There is no redemption.

In the biblical book of Proverbs, it speaks of the seven deadly sins—pride, anger, greed, gluttony, envy, lust, and sloth. They talk about how a fool is against discipline, instruction, and correction. "Don't tell me what to do." They believe in their own minds, ideas, and beliefs. They never look up; they always look horizontally. They believe what their friends are believing; the source of their information is anecdotal or their favorite news station. Your political party is *not* God. Your president is *not* God. Your leaders are *not* God. Your favorite athlete or Hollywood star is *not* God.

There is only *one* God.
He created Heaven and Earth.
He created the Universe. Just look around you. . .
He created the mountains.
He created the stars.
He created the sun.
These ideas are radical today.

In today's culture, if you say one thing that disagrees with somebody else's ideology—you're a racist, you're a homophobe, you're a Nazi. There is no forgiveness!

I always say, I am totally liberal with my love but conservative in a lot of my thinking . . . but I believe in forgiveness!

I think we have to live with a moralizing principle above us. God-given rights. A higher good. Order. Something coherent, that anchors us. Something beautiful.

Without God in your life, all the pressure of life is on you to figure everything out.

Now, this just my opinion. I'm a Bronx rock 'n' roller from New York. I just believe our society will fall apart if we all don't stream toward a Higher Power. I don't believe in any type of movement or organization that doesn't include the disabled, the weak, and the weary. We *all* should be included. We *all* should be American heroes now. We should be *doing* instead of *talking*.

We should all be thinking, “I will be the hero in my family. I will be a hero in my neighborhood, in my town.” Instead of being part of the problem, we should be trying to be part of the solution. Thank God for our freedom of speech that I can talk like this and even share this with you.

Because it’s coming from love.

It’s coming from truth.

America is a great place.

That’s my American Idea.

I just wrote a song called “American Hero,” and the lyrics are on the next page. Please read it. I hope you enjoy it.

An American Hero

We saw the lights go down across the land.
We were waiting for someone to take a stand.
There was no one near to hear the call
and no one listening to us at all.
Hey, now, you know we need an American hero.
Right now, we’re searching for an American hero.
Who will stand up tall for everyone?
I grew up in a little town just off the grid.
We didn’t have a dime to spend, but no one did.
We watched the world as if from far away,
and it was growing darker every day.

We weren’t big enough to change the scenes.
That was for people in the magazines.
But what if no one stood to play the part?
But what if no one had a hero’s heart?

Hey, now, you know we need an American hero.
Right now, we’re searching for an American hero,
who will stand up tall for everyone.
Why are we waiting from afar?
Let’s be the heroes where we are.
Maybe we’ll change the world. We’ll never see

unless we try to change it, you and me.
It's time to stand up here and evermore,
become the heroes we've been waiting for.
Hey, now, you know we need an American hero,
who will stand up tall for everyone.

A rare moment captured in Miami—one of the most diverse cities in the nation!

A sketch Dion did after 9/11: “My city. My country. My home.”

It's easy to find Dion on Dion DiMucci Way in the Bronx.

74. GIORGIONE, DIED 1510: CHRIST BEARING THE CROSS 19½ X 15½

41.

Forgiveness: The Foundation of All Healing

"I thought I saw him walking over the hill
With Abraham, Martin, and John."

There's been a fading of forgiveness as of late in our country. It's a good thing to bring this practice of forgiveness into your life. Again, it's a process—you just do it. You don't have to "feel" that you want to forgive. Your thoughts change your feelings. I learned this first-hand from Martin Luther King Sr., the father of MLK Jr., who was murdered by the racist and psychopathic James Earl Ray. I remember this vividly because I got sober on April 1, 1968, and I watched the coverage on MLK Jr.'s assassination on television, April 4, 1968. I'll never forget the reporters sticking the microphones into Sr.'s face, asking him, "Do you hate the man who did this to your son?" His answer shocked me. "I can't hate any man. If I hate, I lower myself to his level and eventually become him."

I learned that holding on to unforgiveness attaches you to the offender. The one who cheated you. The one who deceived you.

The one who stole from you. The one who offended you. The one who stole from you. The one who harmed you—physically, emotionally, mentally, or socially. Forgiveness is giving up the right to take revenge or get even. You do the work. They won't do it. *You pay the price*. But it's true courage, and true beauty. It's what God did for us. He suffered for our sins and freed us. He paid the price! I've been totally forgiven, so it makes it that much easier to let go of unforgiveness.

Forgiveness is the foundation of all healing. When you're holding on to an offense, that person can be on some yacht, drinking some fine wine, enjoying a beautiful day, and you have them in your head, living rent-free. It's like drinking poison and wanting the other person to die.

In my career, I've been involved with people who have been less than honest. I've had record companies, managers, promoters, agents, even so-called "friends," steal and withhold money. Well, I could be a victim all my life and play that card. *Poor me. Poor me. Pour me a drink*. But that's not going to happen. No, there's a way out—a beautiful way out, without ignoring reality. There is a *Higher Reality*, and I choose to live in it. When you know better, you do better—but it takes practice.

When I found out my manager was stealing from me, I remember thinking—*I got this. I'm strong enough. I know how to handle this and how to forgive*. I called my mentor, who suggested I also call my attorney for the legal part of it. He wanted me to cover all my bases. I remember him telling me, "I'm sure you can forgive, but I want you seeing the whole thing clearly and accepting the reality of it. I don't want this to come up later and bite you in the ass."

So, my process began.

It was like learning to play the guitar. I dove into the practice of mastering scales, making mistakes, playing slowly, correcting the mistakes, taking direction, submitting to suggestions. After a while, I developed my own style, becoming great at executing what I was hearing.

Well, forgiveness is the same way. It's a practice. Mentally, I now had my attorney working to protect me legally and uncovering the damage, which gave me great peace. Physically, I wasn't carrying around hatred and revenge in my gut and in my heart. I felt great. Spiritually, I did the work—like the Lord's Prayer says . .

. “Forgive us *our* trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” It’s a process. You do the work. I actually prayed for the well-being of my manager, hoping that he experiences the love of God, even though he has passed on.

I found that people will try to take advantage of you in life. So, like learning to play the guitar, you make some mistakes, you submit to some mentors who may teach you a more effective way, you accept correction, and you develop your own style.

It’s happened so many times in my industry. Billy Joel. Tony Orlando. Leonard Cohen, and many others. But we do the work, the practice, the process, and become free of these pitfalls; you don’t have to continue to be taken advantage of. You become smarter. When you know better, you do better.

But I definitely have to do the work. Some people never get to it. To forgive is to deny myself the right to revenge. I give up the right to get even. It costs to forgive. But it’s worth it. The profit outweighs the costs. God did it for us. It’s true forgiveness and true freedom.

42.

Watching the Wheels Go 'Round

"THE WANDERLUST NO LONGER OVERTAKES ME,
AND EACH SHADOW ON MY PILLOW DISAPPEARS.
SO I WATCH THE CARAVAN OF TIME GO BY,
AND LISTEN FOR THE SOFT PARADE OF YEARS."

Dion and I were walking in the streets of Manhattan to go to a rehearsal of *The Wanderer*—the musical based on the life and music of my beloved mentor—a show that captures the awe, the wonder, and the beauty of early rock 'n' roll history, with great romance and redemption. We were in the upper Fifties near Seventh Avenue.

"Adam, my dear friend and promoter Sid Bernstein brought the Beatles over to New York City for the first time ever to play Carnegie Hall—right up the street here."

"Really, D?"

"Yeah. You know, of the four Beatles, John Lennon was my guy. I met John Lennon on February 4, 1964. Susan and I lived just down the road, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street. On that day, I went across the street to buy a jacket on Fifth Avenue. John was there. He recognized me, and we hit it off. We

actually both bought the very same leather jacket. John wore his on the cover of The Beatles' album *Rubber Soul*." **[AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Dion's classic "Ruby Baby" was one of John Lennon's favorite songs and one of the reasons why Dion's face is on the cover of* Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*].*

"Yeah, I loved John Lennon. Brilliant guy, Adam. One of the best songwriters of the twentieth century. You can see the beauty of his life through his potent lyrics in three different stages of his songwriting. First, with The Beatles—'Help.' "

Dion sang the lyrics softly to me in that prominent melody, " 'Help! I need somebody. Help! Not just anybody.' And, boy, don't we all. He was seeking."

"As a solo artist, he wrote 'Imagine.' Amazing musical arrangement, great melody, but . . . I can't sign on with the idea of 'Imagine there's no Heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell below us. Above us only sky.' To be honest, I can't imagine that. . . . I have a great biblical and poetic imagination, and I can't imagine no transcendence, no Heaven, no God. I just can't imagine that."

Dion made me think. No Heaven? No God?

"But, later in his life, John was circling back to looking at God and spirituality. He was coming back to the center. He stopped playing with drugs and was looking for happiness. He was moved by NBC's broadcast of the movie *Jesus of Nazareth* and recorded his original songs 'Talking with Jesus' and 'You Saved My Soul.'

"In this stage, he wrote 'Watching the Wheels.' I could identify with John, seeing as how I, too, had experienced this point in my own life and career. *I'm just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round. I really love to watch them roll. No longer riding on the merry-go-round. I just had to let it go*.

"Adam, the idea is to get off of the outside of the wheel of fortune and live in the middle. You know what? That's what I want the cast to really understand and grasp today. This play is about me letting go of riding the merry-go-round, like John said."

I sat back and watched Dion speak to the cast of The Wanderer. He was surrounded by Michael Wartella, playing Dion; Christy Altomare, playing Susan; and Joey Mclntyre (from New Kids on the Block).

"Yo, guys, I love taking people on a trip. I think the world can really use this story of transformation and recovery right now. I

want to show them how I got off the outside of the wheel of fortune and found how to live in the center, the middle."

Their eyes were glued on Dion.

"Let's say I have the number-one album, like I did this past year —*Dion: Blues with Friends*." Dion took his right hand and motioned to the upper part of an imaginary circle. "At this point, I'm at the top of the wheel of fortune. There is nowhere to go but down. When I was younger, I found my significance being at the top."

Dion lowered the same hand. "But soon . . . the car on the Ferris wheel of fortune is descending. Let's say my album drops lower in the charts. It's there, but less popular. I'm slipping down."

They all nodded, understanding.

Dion took the same palm and hit low on the pretend wheel. "Now, I hit bottom. The album is no longer on the charts. I feel low, like I'm off everyone's radar. I begin to worry. I need more. I crave more. So . . ."

Dion raised his arm now.

"It's time for the comeback. I'm going back up the wheel. I'm excited. I'm in a project. Until I'm back on top, and then I start the cycle all over again. Do you know how many guys I know who live like this? Their happiness is reliant on what's in their bank accounts or the stock market. One day they are up, the next they are down. The idea is to get off the outside of the wheel of fortune and live in the center. The center is where all the beauty is, where the serenity, security, and well-being are."

I watched the cast, loving what they were learning from my spiritual father, just as I do. I kept thinking, *The world needs to hear these conversations*.

Dion then raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"You know what happens when you live in the middle of the wheel, guys? You have the power to use all the gifts God has given you. You can still aim for the stars . . . but your peace of mind, your well-being, your self-worth are not contingent on it. You can work harder and get more done with less effort, 'cause you're not driven blindly. And you live with the outcome with a wonderful sense of celebration and accomplishment!"

The Jacket

After rehearsal, Dion and I went out to dinner at Patrino's in SoHo with the producer of *The Wanderer*, Jill Menza. We all sat down at the table, got comfortable, and ordered a drink. Jill leaned in and asked, "Dion, what is in the center of the wheel?"

Dion adjusted his glasses and smiled from ear to ear.

"You're home in God's love and peace. Jill, God is love.

And when you're in the center, you're free to enjoy everybody!"

A total of 58 influential people landed on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* iconic album cover—including the Legend, The King of the New York Streets. "Ruby Baby" was John Lennon's favorite song!

43.

Being Diligent

Dion's mentorship and guidance truly guided my career, which by now, had really begun to take off. The Los Angeles Lakers contacted me to speak on unhealthy dependencies and how they lead to alcoholism and addictions. Now, every time a big opportunity presented itself, I had to meet with my mentor. I called him up. "D, I need to talk to you. Need your guidance." I could hear a voice in the background and someone strumming a guitar. Dion was busy recording his new album, *Girlfriends*, with producer Wayne Hood.

"I'm in the studio. Why don't you swing by? We'll play you the new track, and then we can talk."

There was a buzz in the studio from the creativity. I had worked with Wayne before, recording my audio book for *Lotsaholic: From a Sick to Sober Superman*. It was great to see him, and we gave each other a warm embrace. The three of us sat on the studio chairs as the music vibrated in the room—truly some of Dion's best work. He took his acoustic guitar off his lap and gently laid it against the wall. Wayne turned around to his desk and workstation. He put on a pair of headphones and started to play with the control surface, amps, monitors, digital converters, and a bunch of other switches and gadgets.

"Adam, what's up?"

I explained the gig of going to Los Angeles and that I really wanted to make sure I served the team and athletes to the best of my abilities. Dion smiled and patted my knee. And the wisdom poured out.

"They're professionals, but they are also young men. Some just

out of high school and college. Talk to them about being aware and being diligent. To pay attention to their bodies, finances, emotions, mind-set, and relationships. When something is wrong in their body, they go to the team doctor and buy some peace of mind. They should be that way in every aspect of their lives. Financially, make sure that they sign their own checks and watch their expenses. Agents, managers, I've had them and . . . it's a wonderful thing to trust. Beats the alternative—to lock themselves in their mansions and not come out. They'll never get hurt. But it takes courage to trust. Stress to them to pay attention. This is even more true in their spiritual health. When they make sure they're right with God, great events will come to pass for them and countless others. It's a better way to live—it's a privileged way to live. Maybe most importantly, teach them to have a mentor, a confidant, someone they can talk to. Even a priest, or minister. An outside reference to their life so they can truly see the forest from the trees. Like what we have."

I thought about all the situations I had gone through, and Dion was always there to share with. It made me lighter, stronger, and more confident in my decisions. I may not play in the NBA, but who doesn't need more confidence? Kobe had Michael Jordan. I have Dion. They should find one person they can trust.

"Adam, the spotlight has a strange effect on people; it's like a narcotic. It can bring these athletes down. Especially if they're not right with God. People are not meant to be worshipped. Back in the day, I was invited to a Clive Davis birthday party. I was sitting at a table with Hall and Oates and Barry Manilow. Barry and I got into a conversation about people in show business who self-destruct. Just then, Whitney Houston walked in. She has an amazing holy and religious family around her. I thought she was good to go. But one just never knows. So, share with them to be diligent, to pay attention . . . because God's grace is always being offered but is frequently refused. Yo—that includes you and me."

ROCK 'N' ROLL HALL NAMES ITS NEW GREATEST HITTERS

The Rolling Stones: redefined sexuality, showmanship and made hits for 25 years.

Dion: the Eternal Wanderer.

Otis Redding: singsational soul.

The Temptations: outsang all others.

Stevie Wonder: never limited.

The Rolling Stones, Dion, Otis Redding the Temptations, and Stevie Wonder are honored by their own

The *New York News* announcing the New Greatest Hitters into The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

44.

How Did This Happen to You?

Dion and I were on the legendary Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea VIII music festival cruise. It was incredible to see my mentor perform next to and loved by musicans like Joe Bonamassa, Little Feat, Bobby Rush, Mike Zito, Jimmy Vivino, and others! Bob Dylan called Dion "a bluesman from another Delta." Pete Townshend said, "Dion, like a circling star that never fades, generates the energy and fire we need we need to pull ourselves up, start again, and keep shining."

In both performances, the crowd went absolutely nuts. It's wild to watch them sing him back his lyrics from "Ruby Baby," "Teenager in Love," "The Wanderer," and the famous "Hey, Hey," from "Runaround Sue." But, I also love how this crowd also knows all his *current* blues hits, like "The Thunderer," "I Got the Cure," and "Stomping Ground."

While sailing the Atlantic, I was able to steal Dion from his fans, young and old, and tell him how amazing the experience was. "D, it's incredible how all this happened. From the Bronx to the blues cruise."

"Adam, you just brought up a memory. I was talking to my sister one afternoon, and I told her to ask me anything she'd like. Nothing was off the table. 'Ask me any question you'd like to ask me . . .'

And she said, 'How come this happened to you and it didn't happen to me? I didn't know exactly what she meant, so I questioned her about it. She wanted to know why I was successful and she wasn't—why *success* happened to me!"

“What did you tell her?” I asked.

“I said, ‘Joni, do you know how hard I’ve worked? Do you know what it takes to write and record one song? How many decisions I have to make? Resolving conflict or the pain of problem-solving?”

I nodded.

“She had no idea that I had to choose words to fit a melody I *thoughtfully created*—a key that was appropriate, the tempo, the idea of actually applying myself to making the sound interesting and exciting! The thousands and thousands of decisions that go into recording one song. Sound, equalization. Volume. Tone. Quality. Effects. Let alone the material, manufacturing, merchandise, marketing, and managing. The promoting on TV and the traveling to different countries. Choosing a band, the instruments and . . . *the work that goes into performing a show*. On and on and on.”

“Wow, D, I never thought of that!”

“Adam, that’s exactly what *she* said. She looked at me and said, ‘Oh! I never thought of that.’ ”

Dion looked at the celebration on the boat and combed his goatee.

“In schools today, they have this group-work thing going on . . . letting the strongest students help the weaker of students, which, of course, is a lovely idea. The stronger students are very eager to help out. But, in the final analysis, they all get the same reward. There’s something wrong with that—not saying who accomplished what, and not giving credit for what they did. My father was a technocrat, and I think he got into my sister’s head that the government should take care of her ‘from the cradle to the grave.’ I have never viewed the world that way, even as a child. I always had a strong sense of justice. I like helping people, but sharing the results and not saying who did what is not right. I believe in justice—equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome. I’ve always appreciated order. I’ve always respected hierarchies, always respected the teachers, the police, people who knew more, who had wisdom, knowledge.

“In the Bronx neighborhood I come from, I was in a gang called the Fordham Baldies—everything was reputation and respect. It had nothing to do with character—we didn’t even know how to spell the word. Reputation—that’s what you are *expected to be*; character is *what you are*. Reputation comes on from the outside; character grows up on the inside of you. It’s intrinsic. Reputation can be made in a moment; you can go viral, and *bang, bam, boom*, you got a great

reputation. I'm not saying a good reputation is not valuable . . . there's nothing wrong with having a good reputation. The Bible says a good name is more desirable than riches; however, a real and lasting, authentic reputation is not made up! Take care of your character, and your good reputation will take care of itself."

45.

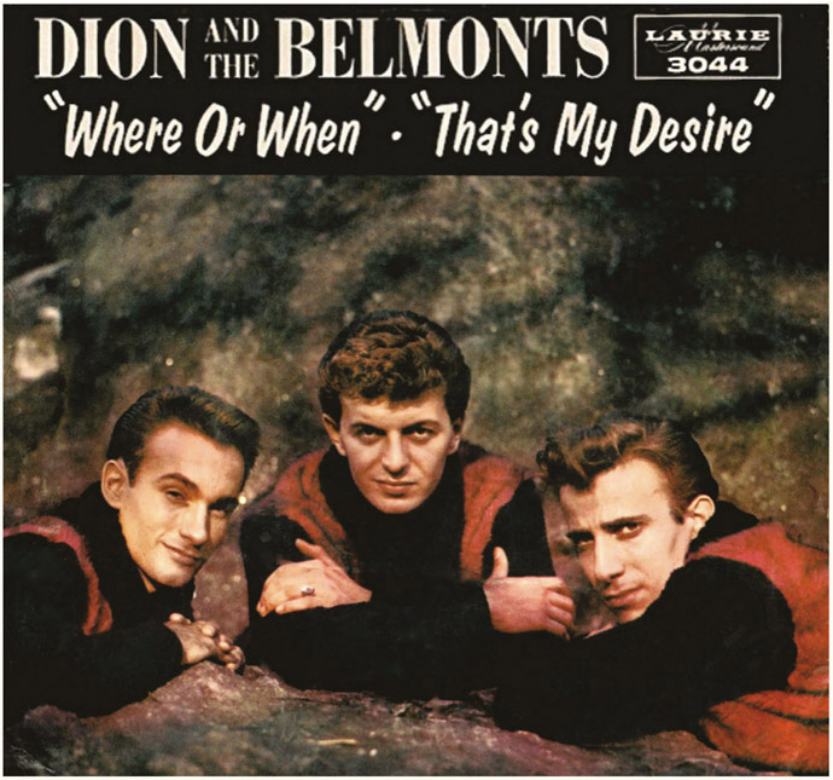
Making Decisions

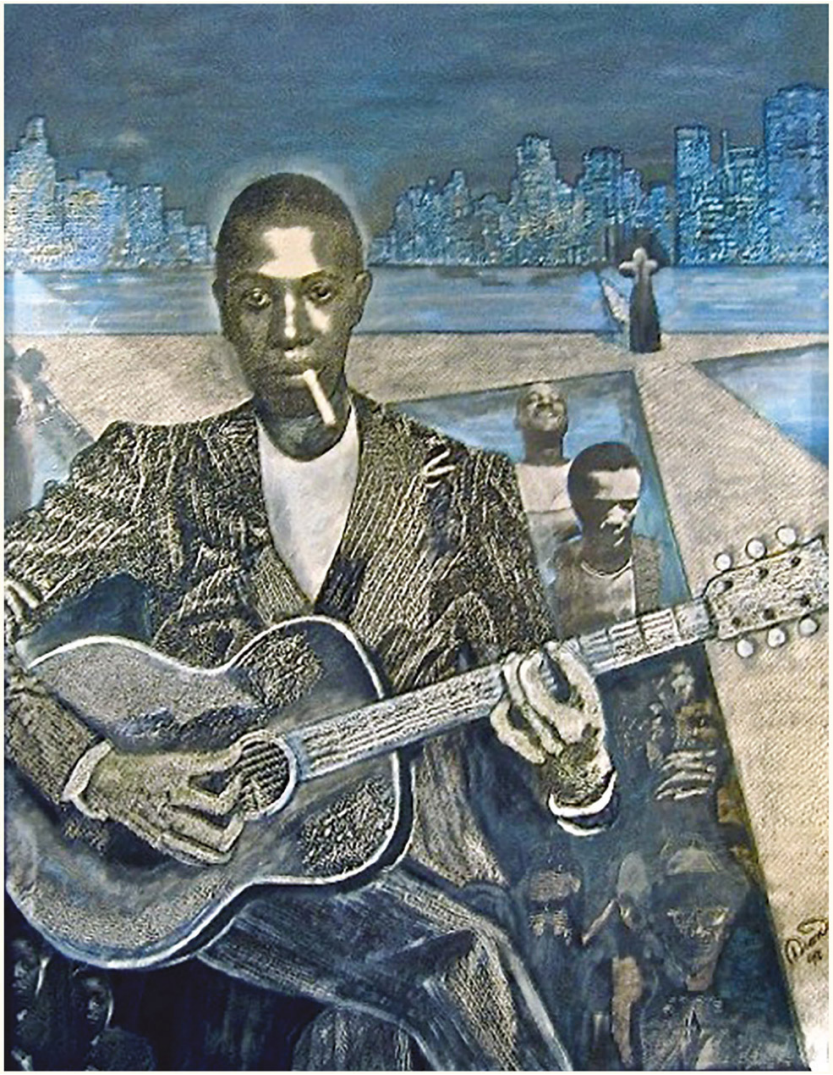
A lot of people have a fear of the future and a fear of the unknown. They don't know what their decisions and choices will bring about, and they want their decisions to bring about the best results. I don't have a crystal ball; I don't know what the future holds, but I am in the hands of the One who holds the future.

I like to look at hard choices as blessings. I ask myself, *Who do I want to become? Who am I to be? How can I bring about the kingdom of God in my little corner of the world?*

I do not want to be a drifter and let the world mediate my future. Hard decisions are precious opportunities. That's what is special about them. We have the power to create reasons for ourselves to become the distinct people that we are.

I've also learned how not to grab onto immediate gratification, to look at the bigger picture—the long-term outcome of my choices and actions—always building character over comfort.


DION AND THE BELMONTS
LAURIE
3044
"Where Or When" · "That's My Desire"



Dion's painting of Robert Johnson.

46.

Claude Monet

A big inspiration in my life was Claude Monet—a great artist from the Impressionist era in France. He lived to the ripe old age of eighty-six. My father brought me down to the Museum of Modern Art, where they were exhibiting Impressionistpaintings from 1840 to 1920. There was Cézanne, Degas, Renoir, van Gogh . . . one of my favorites was Amedeo Modigliani. I just loved his style . . . but the guy jumped off the roof. He was an alcoholic.

My Dad bought me these big books, exhibiting their paintings and biography. I opened the book to the section on Claude Monet first. There was picture of him around eighteen on the streets of France, where he was a dude—just full of himself. The next page had him at the age of thirty, seriously involved in his painting and wanting to do something great. As I turned the pages, he ages. His beard got longer and whiter. By the time I got to the last page, he was eighty-six years old with his entire family around him. The monarch, encourager, a truly inspirational artist who was the responsible head of his entire family *and* extended family. It just made me think, *I want to grow old. I want to age as he did—gracefully—and I want to mature as a responsible artist, who didn't whine, cut off his ear, jump off the roof, or hang himself*.

Monet at the age of eighteen (1858).

I found out that it takes growing up, negotiating, and not making demands on people or giving ultimatums. I'm learning even

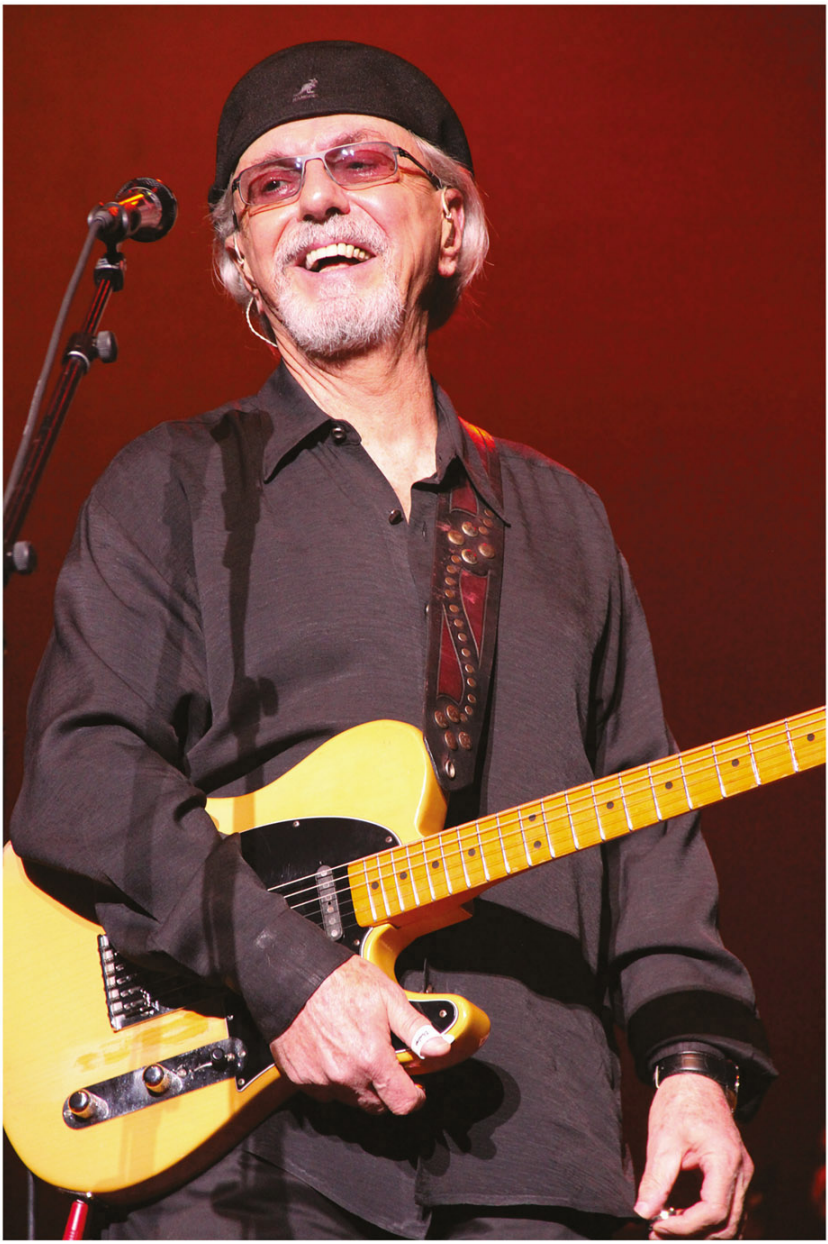
now, with the play, *The Wanderer*. I'm not going to get everything I want in the production—or in life—but I can compromise, be influential, and I can always speak to the top people I partner with. The directors, producers, arrangers, writers, engineers—I can still get my voice heard, like a mature person. I get the top two people that I'm working with, and I can truly make some headway—if I don't embarrass or humiliate them. I've grown up to be a responsible man, not an egomaniac with an inferiority complex. . . .

And maybe, I'll make it to eighty-six, and be like Claude Monet.

Dion, *Top of the Pops*, UK, 1962

Monet, c.1877.

Monet, c.1900.



Dion and his granddaughters.

47.

A Divine Exchange

Rock 'n' Roll has always been a place for spiritual seekers. The music press used to spill a lot of ink over that fact. It came up in record reviews, interviews, and biographies. They thought it was something to admire if a prominent musician was a seeker—if he was searching for meaning in life, if he wanted the truth. Leonard Cohen, George Harrison, Pete Townshend, John Lennon—they were the sensitive souls, spiritual, deep, and cool. They were asking the big questions—about what's real, if there's a God, and what such a God might want from us. The critics and journalists couldn't get enough of this talk.

I wasn't raised in a religious home, but my own traumas forced me to raise the big questions. So, I was an eager reader of other musicians as they talked about their explorations and discoveries. I found it fascinating.

One thing was frustrating, though. They'd have an epiphany. They'd find a guru. They'd read some esoteric book. And they'd speak as if *this* was the answer to everything.

But a month later, they'd be off on a new kick—a different guru, or another book. What had happened to last month's answers? Where did all that inner peace go? The journalists didn't ask the follow-up questions. They just followed the rock stars down the road to the next bright, shiny spirituality.

The quest was everything for these people, both the musicians and the journalists. It was cool to be a seeker. It was cool to search.

The one thing that was uncool was to arrive. If you actually found what you were looking for, if you actually reached your destination, then they branded you a freak. "You're going to

church? What are you, some kind of weirdo?" You were looked at suspiciously and marginalized instantly.

All of this affected me when I was a kid. Because these stars were men I admired, and they were articulate. Also, I was proud and insecure, and I didn't want to be marginalized.

Still, it was a serious matter. I was falling apart inside. I wanted direction. I would have been happy to get just a *moment's* peace.

But, like everyone else, I fell in love with the search for truth. The quest. I was always searching, seeking, never coming to the full knowledge of truth, never accepting the truth, even if all roads seemed to lead me to Jesus.

I kept seeking. I kept searching. I felt as if this kept me in control of my life. My pride kept me from arriving anywhere. My pride kept me from coming home or surrendering. Surrender? That was a four-letter word where I came from. In a street fight, you never surrendered, no matter how bloody you got. In our teenage gangs, we were proud.

Now, in the herd of rock 'n' rollers, we were just as proud. Each of us thought we'd figure it all out apart from the God of the Christians and Jews. We just needed a little more time.

The New Age movement is really appealing to our kind, because it's all about the self: self-realization, self-actualization, self-this, and self-that. We get to *play God*.

In 1968, I did the unthinkable. I surrendered. I made the divine exchange. I gave God my brokenness in a swap for His divine life. I stepped into His world of beauty, goodness, and truth. Let the critics say what they will.

Before that moment, I had no idea about the freedom I have come to enjoy in a firm and stable way—the peace and serenity, the joy and security I know and appreciate. I am totally grateful for today.

“Yo, the Kid is here!”

48.

The Primary Question

"I WAS WISE IN MY OWN EYES / I AWOKE ONE DAY / AND I REALIZED / THIS ATTITUDE CAME FROM HEROIN LIES / KING OF THE NEW YORK STREETS."

I went to New York City with my mentor, my spiritual father, the King of the New York Streets—a very special trip for me, indeed. We were at his original stomping grounds—the Bronx. As we walked down Fordham Road from the Grand Concourse, Dion pointed out special spots and landmarks from his early years. Cousins Record Shop. "Adam, The Grand Concourse is the Champs-Élysées of the Bronx . . . Ralph Lauren was born right up the road. Dewitt Clinton High School is where I went to school for a year with the comedian Robert Klein."

As we walked further down Fordham Road, he pointed out the Windsor Theater, where his grandfather Tony would take him to see performances of *La boheme*, *Madoma Butterfly*, and various other operas. Dion told me that, at the early age of eight years old, it was definitely a blessing in his childhood. Cousins Record Shop, where he bought all his doo-wop and Hank Williams recordings. Arthur Avenue, where his mom and grandma DiMucci did all the shopping. The tenement building. The stoop where he first met Susan. Moe's Candy Store, where he and his boys hung out. Tally's pool room, where they shot pool. Arturo's, the local pastry shop. Some Fordham Baldies fight locations, where they battled with their rival gangs—the Harlem Red Wings and Scorpions. The street corner where he and the Belmonts struck up a harmony and would sing up

a storm. The wisdom was mesmerizing, and I knew this would be a special time to ask that sacred question I'd been holding back from asking over the entire course of our relationship.

Mama Fran's home cooking. Dion and Mom, 749 East 183rd Street in the Bronx, 1959.

"Dion, you've been clean and sober for more than fifty-five years. You're eighty-four years old. You're in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. You've been married sixty years. You have three beautiful daughters who are all doing well. What could you tell someone like me about life? What's the main value? The primary path? The one thing I could focus on to make my life better. The one ingredient that I could look at and cultivate. There must be something of importance that you could tell me from your being around this long, having some degree of sanity, peace of mind, wisdom, serenity, and that feeling of being at home in the world. What's the one thing you could tell me?"

Dion looked me over, smiled, and looked back out at the dense, urban cobblestone streets where he grew up.

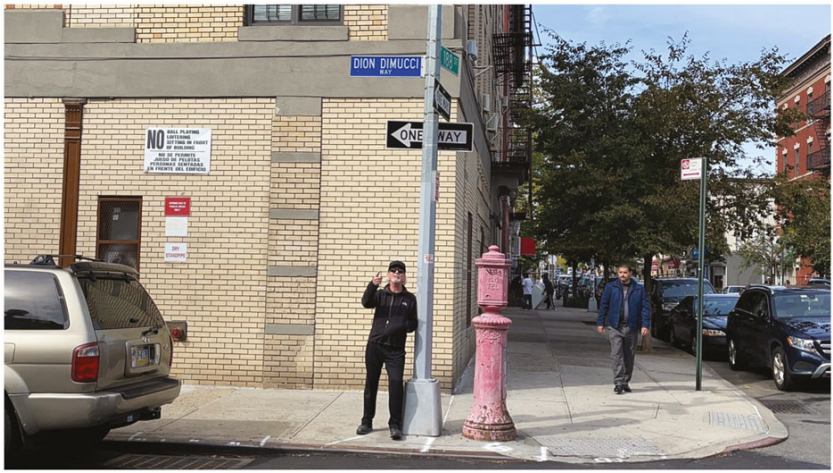
"Adam, take full responsibility for who you are. Take your inventory. Work on yourself. The whole human experience relies on being right with yourself and God. As I have told you before,

Proverbs says, ‘It’s easier to conquer a city than to conquer yourself.’ The more you blame other people, the less you will become. You’ll never feel at home in the world—you will feel entitled. But the less you blame others, the bigger you'll become. You will become a remarkable person!”

We continued walking a few blocks down past Fordham University, and we hit the corner of Belmont Avenue and 627 East 187th Street. Simultaneously we looked up at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. “That’s what the Lord did for me. We die to ourselves, and we rise in a new life with peace and sanity, and we see the world from a godly perspective. We fellowship with the King of the Universe! Adam, we’ve found the privileged way to live. Trust God, clean house, and help others.”

Dion’s grandmother’s apartment building in The Bronx.

Dion and David Greco at Mike's Deli—The Original Arthur Avenue Italian deli, Arthur Avenue Market, in the Bronx.



Dion DiMucci Way. My mentor shares Bellmont Ave and 188th.

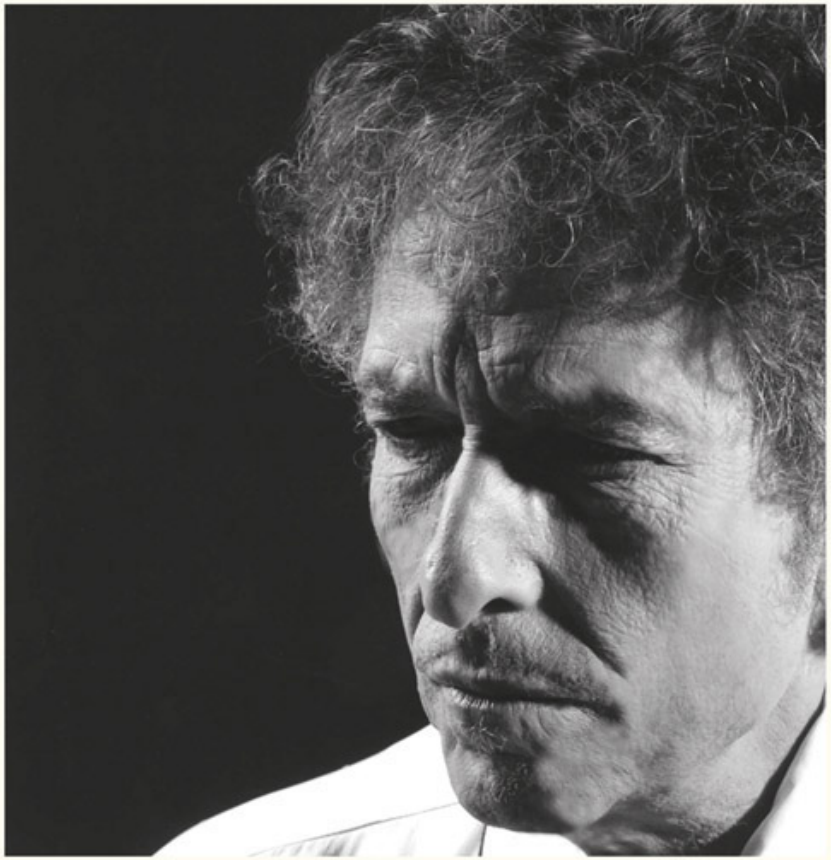
The Bronx, Arthur Avenue.

Appendix

Words from Friends

Bob Dylan

The voice of Dion came exploding out of what Allen Ginsberg called the "hydrogen-jukebox" in the fifties—the hush-hush age. Torn right from the start, he had it magically together in the mythic sense—leveheaded and trustworthy; rhythmically there's no mayhem—just a sense of wonder. In his voice, he tells the untold story in the seemingly secret language. How else do you explain the soulfulness of "Teenager in Love"? An unknowing ear would say it's a song about youthful clap-trap—but it's not, not any more than Tampa Red's "Let Me Play with Your Poodle" is not about dogs. You can hear it in his haunted voice—street-corner hokum, sure, but also barrelhouse blues, the honky-tonk world—even the most sophisticated crooner in the most articulate way—it's all there to put a spell on you.



I saw Dion way back there, when he followed Ritchie Valens and preceded Link Wray and the Wraymen. Ritchie could pitch you over the fence, and Link made you feel like you wanted to take a grotesque, despotic world and hang it with barbed wire, but Dion was no less brilliant—his level was coolheaded; he made you feel longing, excited, and entranced. “Ruby Baby” is severe, round the clock. Listen—you’ll see. Satire, cunning, fidelity, it’s all there in spades. Great singers pass by us like a parade of nobility. There’s just something about them that rises above super-ficial culture.

Dion comes from a time when so-so singers couldn’t cut it—they either never got heard or got exposed quick and got out of the way. To have it, you *really* had to have it—no smoke and mirrors then—not a minute to spare—rough and ready—glorious and grand—grieving with heartache and feeling too much but still with the always “Better not try it” attitude. If you want to hear a great

singer, listen to Dion. His voice takes its color from all palettes—he's never lost it—his genius has never deserted him.

With a vaudevillian father and the doo-wop street corners of the Bronx as teachers, Dion learned early on that the way to be heard and reach hearts was to sing in his own rhythmic voice. And when you have a voice as deep and wide as Dion's, that voice can take you all the way around the world and then all the way back home to the blues.

You have to be careful with the blues. They're strong with lust, and you can overpay for them, but they quote the law. It's a shame more people don't follow that law. Guy Mitchell sang that he never felt more like singing the blues, and we know what he meant. It is an honor for honor's sake. Dion knows how to sing, and he knows just the right way to craft these songs, these blues songs. He's got some friends here to help him out, some true luminaries. But in the end, it's Dion by himself alone, and that masterful voice of his that will keep you returning to share these blues songs with him.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Italian-American rockers of the world, unite! All hail Dion, the real link between Frank Sinatra and Rock 'n' Roll. He could've been in either the Rat Pack or the E Street Band if either had been lucky enough to have him. King of the Rock Swing Shuffle, "Ruby Baby," "Runaround Sue," "Love Came to Me," and, of course, "The Wanderer," the ultimate road song. The line *I got two fists of iron but I'm goin' nowhere* turns all of "The Wanderer" and its macho posturing back in on itself and grounds the music in real life—great attitude. His voice . . . swingin' and soulful . . . his unique phrasing filled with a mixture of street savvy and Catholic choirboy. He made a sound deeply rooted in a sense of place, New York City, summer streets, cool highways, and Ruby . . . baby . . . all night long. I've been lucky enough to have him cut a few of my songs. I'm gonna ask him to cut a few more just so I can learn how to sing 'em. His eye for life and the truth has not failed him; check out "King of the New York Streets" . . . and. of course, he always had the name that said it all . . . *Dion*.

Darlene Love, Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Van Zandt, Gary U.S.

Bonds, and Dion, jamming.

Bruce and Dion.

Peter Townshend

After all the years that have passed, and enduring the recent past of wallowing in the mud of the latest plague to strike us down, it's a good thing there is someone like Dion—named after a satellite of Saturn, so maybe another cosmic bandleader like Sun Ra!—to encourage us to wake up and reenter outer space.

Inspiration is not something you can touch or feel. It is the opposite of what so many of us have been experiencing in the recent lockdowns [during the COVID-19 pandemic]. It's like a magic dust, more potent than any drug or chemical. It comes from things we do and see, what others say and do, that sparks us into action.

What do we all need after years of fighting this mud, wallowing in rules and regulations that may save our lives but have killed our souls and made us crazy? We need someone who has been through all this before. The Wanderer is what we might call him. All this will pass! He shouts this as he gulps another dose of Omega-3,

trying to keep his brain and heart as young as his old soul. He hauls us out, hands us our voices, guitars, and old, out-of-tune pianos, and sings us more songs that began in his heart when he was a little kid, wandering the Bronx, wondering if the war in Europe would ever end.

"It all passed!" he shouts! Join me! Let's make a record!

And so, Mr. Inspiration gave us all back our jobs as the Old Ones, who must inspire those who come after. Dion, like a circling star that never fades, generates the energy and fire we need to pull ourselves up and start again.

Dion is a star who knows well how to start again, how to keep shining. He looks at his watch every few years. *Damn! Let's make a record*. Take care. This one will blow those little white things in your ears right into your brain.

DAVE MARSH

WOW, ITS HAPPENING!

I'd sit with my guitar on the stoop and sing a song like "No One Knows."

Dion remembers, "And when I finished, the guys in the neighborhood would say to me, 'What a fuckin' song! Sing it again!' But if I were to say it, they'd slap the shit out of me. 'Be a man!' " It was the same thing when you saw guys in barrooms, listening to those incredibly sad Sinatra records. You knew exactly what they were thinking about. But you wouldn't see anybody talking to them.

The brilliance of these three CDs is that they do speak, and they speak in one voice. For forty years, from 1958 to 1998, Dion has made all kinds of records: doo-wop, ballads, R&B, blues, folk, singer-songwriter, rock, whatever we call the blend these days. All of it comes together, here and now, because in the end, it is one voice, one vision, one set of attitudes, one man trying to find a way to open his heart and yours—let the feelings flood in, see what happens next. What is the story his music tells? It's the one about a man who yearns to know the secrets of the universe, including the greatest secret of all: how to find and accept love. He is exuberant, desperate, dragged down by the very passions that exalt him,

uplifted amid his sorrow.

You can call this a lot of things—a vision quest, a spiritual journey, or just lookin' for the heart of Saturday night.

For some of us, it's one of those names—like Donatello or Marilyn—that screams beauty. Beauty of a singular kind: Tough-guy swagger meets sensitive soul, rave-up rocker wrapped around suave balladeer. You could find all these versions of him in the songs, but who you found depended, in a way, on what you were looking for. Girls swooned. Guys calculated how to acquire some fraction of that hard cool.

All kinds of kids—it was just kids, then—who didn't know how to say what needed to be said, heard Dion, and he spoke not just to them but for them. "Why must I be a teenager in love?" is not the sound of one man talking. For that matter, neither is "I Wonder Why" or "I got two fists of iron and I'm goin' nowhere." Maybe you knew those guys or maybe you were those guys, but one way or another, you had those feelings. It was a voice that rang with honesty, defiance, vulnerability, and the courage you wished you had yourself.

He's the Prince of the Bronx, King of the New York Streets, and the guy who had to leave town. Had to because, even though *there'll always be a little New York City in my heart*, he also felt *this country soul of mine* right from the start. He is a hero, but he can also be a fool. In a fit of good sense, he marries Sue—who did *not* go out with other guys—but he also tries to be the iron-fisted Wanderer, a role no mortal can bear for long.

Long before John Lennon, Dion discovered the perils of being a working-class hero.

If you really know Dion, you know this: Rock 'n' Roll didn't grow up into the music that conquered the world just because it was easy and fun and got you the girls. There was something deeper there, and, like Dion's country soul, it was there right from the start. Dion heard it in Vito Picone of The Elegants singing, "Where are you, little star?" in a voice so sweet it makes the heart ache to think of it. (If you think he's kidding when he talks about Vito as one of his biggest influences, listen to the version of "Little Star" included here, or the one he slips into "Written on the Subway Wall.") You heard it in the kid with the sweet voice who had the guts to admit he was sometimes nothing but a teenager in love or just a lonely teenager.

But his hair was perfect.

Now I'm seventeen, still alone
Wonderin' if I should go home
Or maybe stay out on my own.

Music was what was most unmistakably in him from the start. Dion DiMucci started singing at five, and, when someone showed up at his house with a guitar when he was ten, he got his parents to buy him one, and he practiced 'til his fingers bled. Two years later, he heard the lovesick voice of Hank Williams, and he was hooked for life on that mixture of happy sadness that lies at the heart of the blues in all forms. The love blossomed when he started listening to Willie Green, a Black man who worked as an apartment building superintendent. Green would sit on his stoop and sing Blues songs by Jimmy Reed and John Lee Hooker. And in another two years, Dion was singing in a local nightclub, where a small-time record impresario picked up on his talent. In '57 he made two singles for Mohawk, the latter with his friends Angelo D'Aleo, who had a tenor to kill for, Fred Milano, the second tenor who rounded out the blend, and Carlo Mastrangelo, a killer bass singer and master of the Rock 'n' Roll beat, whose skills as a drummer were so great that Buddy Holly tried to lure him away.

By early 1958, they were ready for center stage. You can hear in the byplay that opens this set that they knew their way around the studio. Then they hit it, storming from the first beat. Carlo explodes, sounding like a man who can move his tongue so fast, it could drive nails (Dion says he thought about writing a song for him called "Rivet Gun"). As Carlo takes off, so does one of the most exciting doowop discs ever waxed.

Doo-wop is rock 'n' roll as pure innocence, four-part harmonies worked out in hallways, subway platforms, wherever an echo could be found. Its grandest moments—like Vito and The Elegants singing "Little Star," the Cadillacs' "Speedo," or Nolan Strong and the Diablos on the quasi-mystical "The Wind"—are shamelessly soulful or wildly exuberant confessions of puppy love. As a result, the songs had the kind of lyrics that Steve Allen delighted in reciting on his TV show, to show that teenagers and their music were stupid.

Right from the start, Dion ripped up that pattern.

"I Wonder Why" has to be the most knowing, almost cynical

doo-wop song of all time. The singer's friends think he and his lover will break up—and even he has his doubts. *When you're with me, I'm sure you're always true / When you're away, I wonder what you do*. It was that tough, smart edge—which carried over into even "Lonely Teenager," with its homeless kid on the run, safe only as long as he's keepin' it hid—that made Dion different. You can't say for sure whether this had something to do with the fact that Dion was a member of the Fordham Baldies street gang (which did not mean he had to sacrifice his pompadour) and that the rest of the guys grew up around Arthur Avenue in the Bronx, famous for the nation's best bread and baddest bullies. But one way or another, Dion and the Belmonts came on harder, slicker, surer, hipper than any other doo-woppers. This was the real thing—the a cappella tracks here prove that—but Dion used style as a frame, not a boundary.

That was just as true, if not more so, when Dion and the Belmonts went their separate ways—they to continue making powerful doo-wop, he to enter the ranks of hard-core Rock 'n' Roll with "Runaround Sue," "The Wanderer," and "Ruby Baby." (He says he was working off Willie Green's question: "Why don't you write about people you know?") Those records epitomize a new generation of Italian-American braggadocio, fully aware of its Sinatra heritage but veering off into badass rhythm and blues.

There were always darker currents running beneath it. Dion continued to sing some of the deepest love ballads that any rock 'n' roller, Black or white, had ever put down, because the details in the verses he wrote and sang often contradicted or knocked akilter the message conveyed by the chorus.

When Dion sang *I know I'll be all right if I stay out of sight* in "Lonely Teenager," he wasn't indulging in the shock-theater paranoia of Del Shannon in "Runaway." He was sneaking a fragment of reality into a song that's basically a sentimental fantasy. He opened "Runaround Sue" by crying the first lines like a doo-wop balladeer, and then slid into a shuffling backbeat and a set of wordless exclamations that are reminiscent of no one so much as his more-swinging, less-rocking Bronx neighbor, Bobby Darin, driving it home with the great hesitation on the punch line*:*

People let me put you wise / Sue goes out with other guys. She was tougher than he was?

Where did that come from?

Especially since "Sue," the biggest record of his career, was

followed by “The Wanderer,” in which the ultimate womanizer finally comes to declare, *I’m as happy as a clown / With my two fists of iron, I’m goin’ nowhere*. Clowns aren’t happy and the destination is —oblivion? Then there was “(I Was) Born to Cry,” a cry of anguish that didn’t even pretend to be anything else (although no one at the time would have guessed it was the plain truth) and the great “Love Came to Me”: *I, I live in dreams / Strange as it seems*. So much for reality.

I’m not trying to tell you these ironies, contradictions, logical discrepancies were anything like planned, or even deliberate. To pick the most notorious example, Dion says that he originally wanted to sing, “With my two fists of iron and my bottle of beer,” but he couldn’t say that and get the record on the radio.

But whatever Dion knew about the depth of what he was doing, he knew right from wrong. Like every other good-looking kid singer of that era, he was being groomed for a career as a saloon entertainer, playing clubs like the Copa in New York. Even though he played guitar all his life, onstage on the package rock ’n’ roll tours and in the studio, he was being put into sleek mohair and trained to sing the classy stuff with his hands empty. He even had a hit with “Where or When” by Rodgers and Hart, and “In the Still of the Night,” by Cole Porter, not the legendary doo-wop number by the Five Satins. He cut both, the Porter and the Five Satin’s version. The Belmonts did the Porter version, while Dion cut the solo effort. The process accelerated when he left the little Laurie label and joined Columbia, flagship label of the biggest media company in America.

He started off with one of the biggest hits of his career, a blistering remake of “Ruby Baby,” the old Drifters hit, turning their midtempo harmony into rock ’n’r oll with a swinging backbeat. But all the showbiz pros knew that kind of music was a dead end. So his managers had him buy orchestra arrangements for his supper-club dates. They cost $25,000, a fortune to a kid who’d grown up in an apartment where the rent was 36 bucks a month. But Dion hated what those charts did to his music so bad, he went home and burned the damned things. And didn’t look back.

He was a little nuts; he had a drug problem and he womanized. He was scared witless by leaving the secure world of Arthur Avenue, where the gangs existed in part to stomp anyone who entered uninvited. (He remembers coming home with Frankie

Lymon, another teenage rock 'n' roll genius who happened to be Black, and having to fight their way back out.) But even then, Dion knew where his soul was. His life might be fouled up, but he drew the line at messing with the music.

He still had his hits, right up through "Donna, The Prima Donna" and "Drip Drop," both top ten in late 1963. Then the Beatles invaded, and the pop world wobbled as its axis changed. Dion didn't chart a record for the next year, and when he did, his version of Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" hit number 71 and sank like a stone.

When the Beatles arrived, those rock 'n' roll Goliaths began to seem like dinosaurs. Though Chuck Berry snuck in a couple of hits in '64, Little Richard got more attention for having played with the Fab Four than for the solid R&B he was still singing. Elvis movies kept the grosses up for a while, but Jerry Lee Lewis was left nowhere to go but country.

Dion left the Bronx and moved to Manhattan. He hung out in Greenwich Village amid the folk revival, meeting people like singer-songwriter Tom Paxton and hanging with producer Tom Wilson at Bob Dylan sessions. Dion hadn't outgrown rock 'n' roll , but when he signed with Columbia, he fell under the influence of the great John Hammond Sr., discoverer of Billie Holiday, Count Basie, and Aretha Franklin, who turned Dion on to the country blues. Dion added a passion for Robert Johnson to his longtime love of Jimmy Reed and John Lee Hooker. He and Hammond never made a record together, but the influence is unmistakable.

He wasn't having hits, but he was still making records—and some of them were among his best ever. On his version of Paxton's "I Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound," which went nowhere in 1965, he sang like a man with his soul at stake. For a good long while, Dion had been ready to make a more personal and reflective kind of music—you could trace it back to "Gonna Make It Alone" on the *Ruby Baby* album.

But he was still a long ways from home. "Talk about losin' the thread! I lost it in the sixties," he says now. He remembered Willie Green, on the stoop, telling him that *Rebel Without a Cause* was nonsense. "When you rebel for the truth, you really got something." In Dion's records from this period, where he overturns all pretense of teen idolhood to sing songs like "Spoonful," "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," and "Gloria—and sing them well—you can feel him

edging closer to that ideal. Not that he could get all that close with a monkey on his back.

But he also felt what was slipping away. “When we first started making albums, the photographer would say, ‘Put out that cigarette. Put down that glass of whiskey, and smile!’ It seemed like after JFK was assassinated and Dylan put out that *Times They Are A-Changin’* album, you weren’t allowed to smile on your record covers anymore.”

Far from rejecting rock ’n’ roll , Dion recorded some, reuniting with the Belmonts to sing latter-day doo-wop in a short-lived stint with ABC Records after Columbia released him in early ’66. He made good music, but not great music, and the reason, as much as anything else, was that the drugs were running his life. His heroin addiction kept up even after he left Manhattan and moved to suburban Nyack. The depiction of this period in his autobiography, *The Wanderer*, and in his courageous single “Your Own Backyard,” is as pathetic as anything you’ll ever run into. The fact that his career seemed over—and why wouldn’t it? No rock ’n’ rollerl had ever made a comeback from that far down—didn’t exactly slow things down.

Finally, in 1968, his father-in-law suggested that Dion get some help. He kicked his addiction, not for the first time, but this time, he stayed sober. He hadn’t made it alone, but, by the grace of God and with a lot of love, he’d made it.

Over the next several years, Dion transformed himself. He looked different, hair longer and shaggier, wearing glasses and hats. More important, his music was different. Instead of hiding like that lonely teenager, he stepped out in front as the person he really was. Instead of singing “I Was Born to Cry,” he sang “Born to Be With You.” On a series of singer-songwriter-style records, he made confessions—some of them so naked they were almost frightening, like “Your Own Backyard”; some of them virtually beatific, like “Sanctuary”; and some simply heartbreaking like, “New York City Song” and “Running Close Behind You.”

Dion hadn’t been straight long when he even found another hit to pour his heart into. In 1968, a young writer named Dick Holler came to him with an uptempo gospel song based on the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and John F. Kennedy. Dion loved the song, but he heard it in a mellower mode, a sort of folk-rock anthem. Accompanied by guitar, harp, glissandos,

and horn and string sections, his almost unbearably wistful vocal took “Abraham, Martin and John” to #4 on the *Billboard* charts that fall. Ironically, none of the big labels was interested in releasing it; the record came out on Laurie.

Laurie put out the album at Christmas. Called simply *Dion*, it put “Abraham, Martin and John” into his new musical context, alongside a shimmering, virtually psychedelic pop-folk arrangement of Jimi Hendrix’s “Purple Haze” (an arrangement that even Jimi himself admired when Dion played it for him) and the definitive rendition of Fred Neil’s folk standard, “The Dolphins.” Both those songs portray a new Dion, shorn of swagger but still a great singer, scatting at the end of “Purple Haze,” winding through the sinuous melody of “The Dolphins” as if those harp glissandos behind the gorgeous melodies were doo-wopping.

Dion’s inner search was no longer implied—it had become the center of his music and the story it told. It wasn’t always sweet. On the flip side of “Abraham, Martin and John” was a blues song Dion had tossed off in a local studio not long after moving to Miami. “Daddy Rollin’ ” is as mean as any blues/ rock ever made. It’s hard to say what better expresses the dread at the song’s center—the crude, bass-heavy electric guitar riff or the ravaged sweetness of the singing. It’s the redemption of his love for the blues, the proof of his boast on “Your Own Backyard,” that *I can do anything I wanna do / I do it straight / I do it better, too*.

“Your Own Backyard,” his debut single on Warner Bros., came out in mid-1970. It’s a precisely detailed anti-drug sermon, Dion’s first detailed depiction of his life as a junkie and alcoholic: “My idea of having a good time,” he says in faltering, quasi-stoned cadences, “was sittin’ with my head between my knees.”

Over the next six years, Dion made five fine albums: *Sit Down Old Friend*, *You’re Not Alone*, *Sanctuary*, *Suite for Late Summer*, and *Streetheart* for Warners. All are steeped in confessional autobiography, in the singer-songwriter mold. He also toured the remnants of the folkie coffeehouse circuit, accompanied by nothing but his own guitar. At its best, the spareness of this music marries the beauty of Dion’s original rock ’n’ roll with a very adult lyrical perspective.

That’s what makes up the core of the second disc of this set.

Those records didn’t make Dion a celebrity again. From 1970 to 1989, he would be absent from the singles charts, and though he

made a series of excellent albums for various labels, his last chart-making album in that period was *Reunion: Live at Madison Square Garden 1972*—another regrouping with the Belmonts—released in 1973.

But Dion didn't fail. He continued to make excellent music, which he'd learned was the essential task. The result is an artistic triumph, and not a small one. There is no other first-generation rock 'n' roll star who could have made this set, because none of the others continued to develop a personal voice and used it into the third and fourth and fifth decades after Eric Clapton and Dion's initial eruption onto the rock scene.

Dion has done this over and over again, no matter how many or how few were paying attention. His music remained a single story, but like any good tale, it developed continually in scene after scene. After a tense, difficult 1975 session with Phil Spector that produced the fine single, "Born to Be with You," but not much else of note, he recorded with the producers Cashman and West. *Return of the Wanderer* and *Fire in the Night* came out in 1978 and 1979, respectively, on their Lifesong label. Each contained several interesting reflections on living as a sober adult, especially "We Don't Talk Anymore," a shrewd appraisal of marital communications in tatters. In songs like "(I Used to Be a) Brooklyn Dodger" and "Lookin' for the Heart of Saturday Night," Dion found a new perspective on his past. As Greil Marcus wrote in *Rolling Stone*, such songs represent "one man's attempt to keep faith with the past without being trapped by it."

Beginning with 1980's *Inside Job*, which contained "The Truth Will Set You Free," his most detailed description of the relationship between growing up in the Bronx and his Catholic Christian faith, Dion made five gospel-oriented albums (including *Put Away My Idols*, which garnered both a Dove Award and a Grammy nomination in 1983).

In 1989, he returned to making secular music with the fine *Yo, Frankie* for Clive Davis's Arista lab. The album put him back on the charts, albeit briefly and in the lower rungs, and he toured for a time with Lou Reed, one of the contemporary rock giants most heavily influenced by Dion's hits. The themes and his vocal style hadn't changed that much, which is in itself quite a surprise—again, it was something none of his '50s peers had managed. Like all the rest, his influence was everywhere (try to imagine Bruce

Springsteen or Billy Joel without Dion to set the stage), but those who knew enough to seek out his current music were never let down. Dion's talent and commitment to music never wavered. He held on to his vision of love and the blues, and he never surrendered his belief in the worth of searching through one to find the other. That's what carried him through.

He didn't record as often in the '90s, but when he did, the results were often superb. His versions of "Mean Woman Blues," from the 1990 tribute album *The Last Temptation of Elvis*, and "Turn Me Loose" (redeeming a Fabian hit), from *Till the Night Is Gone*, the 1995 CD paying tribute to songwriter Doc Pomus, who wrote "Teenager in Love" as well as the interpolation of "Little Star" into *Written on the Subway Wall*, all showed that Dion remains at heart a rock 'n' roll singer. So does "Shu-Bop," an up-to-date slice of doo-wop he put together in 1999. The 1998 live recordings he did with the Little Kings, a band led by Scott Kempner, former leader of the Del-Lords, another crew of torrid Bronx rockers, show that he doesn't have to reprise '50s hits or styles to remain a powerhouse beat-music singer.

If you want to know what a seamless garment Dion's rock 'n' roll *Streetheart* has made, listen to the two songs he sings by that other dreamer of big dreams, Bruce Springsteen. "If I Should Fall Behind" was released in 1992 on *Dream on Fire*, the best Dion album of that decade. He took a song done as a folk-country love song in the original and converted it to sensuous R&B harmony. (Springsteen toned down the arrangement but kept the basic idea for the version he did on the E Street Band reunion tour.) On Springsteen's "Book of Dreams," he pulls off something even more unlikely—he converts an autobiographical account of someone else's wedding day into something so intimate, so directly personal, that it feels universal. This is a blend of musical magic not often reached by any singer, let alone one who was about to turn sixty. Dion doesn't sound old, and I don't think he ever will. He sounds like what he is: a man whose soul is saturated with music. And, as he always reminds us, souls are immortal. The great thing about his music is that it helps us all touch a little bit of that immortality right here on Earth.

I don't mean that his voice will be heard forever—although it will be heard as long as there are humans still interested in that bit of artistic expression called rock 'n' roll. I mean that its yearning and exultation, its shouts and cries, the spirit with which this man

tells his particular tale, puts us into contact with a taste of the highest things humans try to grasp. For me, Dion is more than just King of the New York Streets, Prince of the Bronx. I think he's an artist, and in the realm of popular music, a genuinely great one. Like any great American musician, he starts out embedded in the blues—that is the bedrock of the journey—but like all great artists, he ends up expressing something better than misery incarnate.

Dick Clark

Through out my life, I have watched Dick Clark present a legion of talent. Presenting him tonight is definitely a pivotal moment in my life. In an era when there was no such thing as teenagers (let alone teenage music) While we were living our parents lives Rock & Roll pulled us from that shadow - and gave us a voice - gave us our own culture, our own identity and an expression all our own.

1955 glued to my radio, I devoured every note from Alan Freed's "Moondog Show".

Then from Philadelphia, "American Bandstand" - an endless river of talent flowed directly into my second story apartment in Bronx, New York City. I felt the fury of this New Rock & Roll music dance across my living room floor.

Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard. Hangin' out as a street corner poet, burnt to the bone with the fire of my own ambition, I fantasized things like making love to Marilyn Monroe and appearing on Dick Clark's show.

Only one of those things would come true!. At my first appearance on Bandstand, I was so painfully shy - Dick not only asked the questions... he had to answer them too, because all I could do was shrug .... there was stark terror in his eyes, as I remember it.

Dick Clark created a unifying tread between the east and west coast, between different cultures, and among the races. In the music world, Dick Clark was the bridge between radio "n" TV. Without singing a note, without striking a single chord, without cutting a solitary record, Dick Clark has emerged as a titan in the music business.

Standing high among the very tallest, he has more than paid rent for the space he occupies on out planet. Forged as he is from legendary loyalty and compassion, he remains ageless and timeless.

In our rapidly changing Rock & Roll World, he is the **one** dependable constant, always himself and always in style.

It's been my pleasure to know Dick as a friend for the past 35 years.

His record has a great beat ... but you can't dance to him. Yet on his own scale, we give him a 100 because he has made our songs, his song. The integrity of his life and his unique approach and vision have lit our entire world.

Ladies and gentlemen ...Dick Clark!

Acknowledgments

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COMPOSERS:

CHAPTER	SONG	COMPOSER
3.	The Wanderer	Ernie Maresca
4.	Lovers Who Wander	Dion DiMucci, Ernie Maresca
5.	The Truth Will Set You Free	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
6.	The Wanderer	Ernie Maresca
8.	King of the New York Streets	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
9.	Tank Full of Blues	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
10.	Runaround Sue	Dion DiMucci, Ernie Maresca
11.	Behind Susan's Eyes	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
12.	The Best	Bob Littleton

14.	Center of My Life	Dion DiMucci
15.	Way Down	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
18.	Sweet Surrender	Dion DiMucci
20.	New York Is My Home	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina, Scott Kempner
24.	The Bell Ringer	Arthur Kitchener
25.	Like a Rolling Stone	Bob Dylan
26.	King of the New York Streets	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
27.	A Teenager in Love	Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman
31.	The Thunderer	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
32.	He Did	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
33.	The Thunderer	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
34.	Center of My Life	Dion DiMucci
36.	Here in America (Song for Sam Cooke)	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
37.	I Got the Cure	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
38.	Abraham, Martin, and John	Dick Holler
40.	An American Hero	Dion DiMucci, Mike Aquilina
41.	Abraham, Martin, and John	Dick Holler
42.	Soft Parade of Years	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy
48.	King of the New York Streets	Dion DiMucci, Bill Tuohy